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THOREAU'S PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

WITH SPECIAL CONSIDERATION OF THE
INFLUENCE OF HINDOO PHILOSOPHY

INAUGURAL-DISSERTATION

ZUR

ERLANGUNG DER DOKTORWÜRDE

DER

HOHEN PHILOSOPHISCHEN FAKULTÄT

DER

GROSSHERZOGLICH BADISCHEN

RUPRECHT-KARLS-UNIVERSITÄT ZU HEIDELBERG

VORGELEGT VON

H. A. SNYDER.

Dedicated to my dear parents.

Table of Contents.

Biographical Sketch	I
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CHAPTER I.—RELIGION.

	Page
I. Introductory	7
II. Acquaintance with Hindoo Literature	9
III. Conception of God	12
1. God as First Cause	12
2. God as Preserver	12
3. God as Immanent Creator	13
4. God Identical with Nature	14
5. God without Limitations of Personality	16
IV. Conception of Man	18
1. Relation to Nature	18
a. One with Nature	18
b. Respect for Plants and Animals	19
✓ c. Abstinance from Meat Eating	20
2. Relation to God.	21
a. One with God	22
b. Dualism	24
c. Original Sinlessness	25
d. Sin.	26
✓ 3. Purpose of Life	27
✓ 4. Conditions of Fulfilling Life's Purpose	28
✓ a. Negation of Self.	28
✓ b. Renunciation of the World	30
✓ Avoidance of Disturbing Influences	31
✓ c. Solitude.	31
✓ f. Silence.	32
c. Negation of Desire	33
d. Negation of Works	34
a. Faith	36
✓ b. The Yoga	37
V. Immortality	38
1. Death—Metamorphosis	38
2. Transmigration of Souls	39

	Page
3. Form of the Soul Eternal	40
4. Death of the Body its Reunion with Nature	40
5. Sleep	41
a. Dreams	41
b. Deep Sleep	42
6. Wind, the Breath of Spirit	43
7. Unconcern Regarding the Future State	43

CHAPTER II.—MUSIC.

Significance of Art—Introductory	47
1. Music a Revelation of the Universal	48
a. Transcends Reason	49
b. Speaks with Assurance	49
2. Ethical Value of Music	50
a. Reveals Unreality of the Apparent World	50
b. Reveals Possibility of Harmony with Eternal De- signs	50
c. Lifts above the Limits of Personality.	52
d. Effects Oneness with the Universal	52
3. Hearing of Music a Religious Act	53
a. Music only for the Virtuous	53
4. Music Universal and Perpetual	54
✓ a. Nature and Music One	54
✓ b. Music of the Spheres.	55
5. Best Music Worldless	55
✓ a. Silence the most Perfect Music	56
✓ 6. Music and the Yoga Practice	56

CHAPTER III.—LOVE.

I. Thoreau and the English Pantheistic Poets—Introductory	59
✓ 1. Love to Nature	59
✓ 2. Relationship to Natural Objects	59
3. Nature-love a Passion	60
4. Manifestation of the Divine in Nature the source of Love to Nature	61
5. The Spirit of Nature is the Spirit of Love	62
✓ 6. Love the Atmosphere of Life in Nature	63
II. Love to Man: Friendship	64
1. Platonic Love	64
2. Love, Community of Ideals	65
a. Love Detects Faults	65
b. The Place of Hate	66

	Page
3. Love is Universal not Personal	66
a. Death cannot Interrupt Love's Course	67
4. Ethical Value of Love	67
III. Love and Marriage	67
IV. Love to Mankind	68
1. Not Philanthropy	68
2. Universal in Character	68
✓ V. The Goal of Love Oneness with the Spirit of Love Itself	69

CHAPTER IV.—POLITICS.

1. Introductory	73
2. Civilization Corrupt	73
a. Return to Nature	74
3. Thoreau and Rousseau	74
4. Basis of Government the Individual	75
5. Democratic the Best Form of Government	76
a. Danger of Perversion to Serve Individual Ends	76
b. Against Government by Majorities	77
6. Object of Government	78
a. Kant and Emerson : Morality the Object of Govern- ment	78
7. Character of the Best Government	79
a. The Best Men its Members	79
b. Representation of the Best Elements of the Nation	79
8. Relation of the Citizen to the Government	80
a. Duty of Obedience to the Laws of His Own Being only	80
b. Right of Resistance	81
c. Individual Responsibility	82
d. Power of One Man	82
9. Thoreau's Attitude toward Socialism	83
10. Ideal Government—No Government	83

APPENDIX.

I. Chronological Table	87
II. Bibliography	91

Lebenslauf.

Ich, Helena Adell Snyder, bin zu Port Elmsley, Ontario, Canada, geboren. Ich bin englische Unterthanin und wurde Protestantisch erzogen. Ich besuchte das Gymnasium zu Smith's Falls und nachher zu Perth welches ich mit dem Zeugnis der Reife im Jahre 1890 verliess. Ich widmete mich hierauf dem Studium der Englischen Litteratur und Philologie, Geschichte und Philosophie an der Universität Queen's zu Kingston wo ich im Jahre 1895 den Magister liberalium artium erhielt. In demselben Jahre legte ich mein Staatsexamen bei der Canadischen (Ontario) Regierung ab.

Zur Fortsetzung meiner Studien begab ich mich an die hiesige Universität woselbst ich im Jahre 1899 als Hörerin der philosophischen Fakultät inscribiert wurde. Ich hörte vorzugsweise die Vorlesungen der Herrn Professoren Hoops, Fischer, Thode, Braune, von Duhn und Ihne und bin allen diesen Herren für reiche wissenschaftliche Anregung und Forderung zu herzlichem Dank verbunden.

Biographical Sketch.

Henry David Thoreau was born at Concord, Massachusetts, on the 12th of July, 1817, and with the exception of a few years which the family spent in Chelmsford and Boston, he passed there his childhood and youth up to the time of entering college in 1833. At Harvard he does not seem to have distinguished himself in his studies or to have obtained very high standing in his classes. So much time did he devote to outside, general, classical reading, so little did he work to the satisfaction of his professors that he obtained only about half of the bursary which would otherwise have been given him out of the fund for the assistance of poor students. His essays, however, excited considerable comment and were the means of his becoming acquainted with Emerson. Shortly after his graduation, he, with his brother, founded a private school in Concord, and as Emerson was then residing in that village, their friendship became strong and intimate.

Emerson and Margaret Fuller were joint editors of the "Dial," a magazine on much the same plan as the German "Horen," and to which almost all the better talent of the United States contributed. Thoreau was invited to write for it and consented. His first published paper, "Aulus Perseus Flaccus," appeared in it in 1840, and he was a regular, though unpaid, contributor until it suspended publication in 1844.

But the private school did not pay expenses, so in 1843 the brothers abandoned it, and Henry went to Staten Island as tutor to the sons of Mr. William Emerson. He seems to have done so unwillingly however, and to have felt that he could only find his true life in withdrawing from a life of mean

cares and constant anxiety concerning the merely physical and temporal. He expressed his dissatisfaction in a letter to his friend Ellery Channing, who replied :

"I see nothing for you on this earth but that field which I once christened "Briars;" go out upon that, build yourself a hut, and then begin the process of devouring yourself alive."

The next year, 1844, Thoreau resigned his position and returned to Concord.

"I have thoroughly tried school-keeping," he writes, "but was obliged to dress and train, not to say think and believe accordingly, and I lost my time into the bargain."

In 1845 he retired to Walden Woods, where he built himself with his own hands a hut on the shore of the pond.

Wonderful stories, resembling those told of St. Francis of Assissi, are told of his intimacy with the wild animals in the wood: "The fishes swam into his hand; the mice would come and playfully eat out of his fingers, and the very mole paid him friendly visits; sparrows alighted on his shoulder at his call . . . snakes coiled round his leg . . . he pulled the woodchuck out of his hole by the tail and took the foxes under his protection from the hunters."

It was while living at Walden, too, that he was seized and put in goal for refusing to pay the taxes imposed by a wholly iniquitous government.

For two years and a half he lived alone in his cabin; then when Mr. Emerson went to England, in 1847, he yielded to the claims of friendship and went to stay with Mrs. Emerson and the children. His letters to Emerson during this period are very interesting, and permit us to see how he was held in esteem by the older members of the family and loved by the children. After Emerson's return home towards the end of the next year Thoreau felt it his duty to assist in the support of his own mother and sisters. He took up his father's trade of pencil-making, and continued to reside in the town instead of returning to Walden. He lived, however, in as absolute retirement and almost as much in Walden Woods and at the heart of Nature as he had in his Walden cabin.

In this year he published his first book—written ten years earlier—"A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers," an account of a week's trip in a row-boat taken by him in company with his brother John. The book did not sell very well, and the publishers requested him to remove the unsold copies from their warehouse, as they had no room to store them. He complied with their request, and in his diary of October 28, 1853, thus humorously describes his plight :

"I have now a library of nearly nine hundred volumes, over seven hundred of which I wrote myself. Is it not well that the author should behold the fruits of his labor? My works are piled up on one side of my chamber half as high as my head, my Opera Omnia. This was authorship, these are the works of my brain!" *humorous?*

But this did not in the least discourage him: "Indeed," he continues in the same record in his diary, "I believe that the result is more inspiring and better for me than if a thousand had bought my wares. It affects my privacy less and leaves me freer."

His second book, "Walden,"* which describes his life in the woods, was not published until 1854. It is, perhaps, the most widely read of his works, and has been translated into several European languages.

In 1856 Thoreau made the acquaintance of Horace Greeley at Chappaqua, who offered him the tutorship of his sons. He considered the proposition for a time for the sake of his family, but at last refused, holding that "the life is more than meat and the body more than raiment."

He continued, however, to write for several magazines, for the most part articles descriptive of trips he occasionally took during the summer, as, for instance, two walking tours about Cape Cod, three visits to the forests of Maine and a longer journey into Lower Canada. These excursions were made on foot, alone or with one single friend (with in Maine an Indian for a guide), and so were entirely in keeping with the still privacy of his whole life. His last trip was taken in

* Translated into German by Emma Emmerich. (Palm, München.)

1861, when his friends, concerned about his failing health, persuaded him to go to Minnesota, hoping that in the dry, clear climate of that State he would be able to shake off the disease of the lungs which had attacked him. It was not of any lasting benefit, however. Not long after his return to Concord he wrote to his young friend Benton :

“ You ask particularly about my health. I suppose I have not many months to live, but of course I know nothing about it. I may add that I am enjoying existence as much as ever and regret nothing.”

“ His patience was unfailing,” writes Channing. “ He knew not aught save resignation ; he did mightily cheer and console those whose strength was less.”

He died on the 6th of May, 1862, and was buried in the peaceful “ Sleepy Hollow ” cemetery at Concord. The inscription was written by Channing :

“ Hail to thee, O man ! who has come from the transitory place to the imperishable ! ”

CHAPTER I.

Religion.

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Religion.

I.—Introductory.

The world has in all ages found it marvellous when a man, contrary to the natural desire for life and self-realization in the world, has withdrawn himself from it; and that in the nineteenth century, in practical, Protestant America, Thoreau, young, physically robust and highly educated, should renounce, not only worldly pleasure, but practically the whole struggle for existence, could not fail to excite especial wonder and much speculation as to his motives.

"Few lives contain so many renunciations," writes Emerson. "He was bred to no profession; he never married; he lived alone; he never went to church; he never voted; he refused to pay a tax to the State; he ate no flesh; he drank no wine; he never knew the use of tobacco, and, though a naturalist, he used neither trap nor gun. He chose, wisely, no doubt, for himself, to be the bachelor of thought and nature." *

Naturally, such a life met with little sympathy from Thoreau's fellow-countrymen, who, for the most part, attributed his course to selfishness, a lack of energy and the desire to shirk all responsibility as a citizen of the State and a man among men. His whole life demonstrated, however, that these accusations were without foundation and that such motives could play no part in influencing his decision. Yet even Emerson, his great contemporary and friend, who himself led a singularly unworldly and free imaginative life, did not see the full significance of Thoreau's negation of life, and could

* From the address delivered by R. W. Emerson at Thoreau's funeral and printed in the "Atlantic Monthly," August, 1862. See Preface, "Miscellanies."

not but bemoan the loss of his splendid talents to the world :

“ Had his Genius been only contemplative,” wrote Emerson in his biographical sketch, “ he had been fitted for his life, but with his energy and practical ability he seemed born for great enterprise and for command ; and I so much regret the loss of his rare powers of action that I cannot help counting it a fault in him that he had no ambition. Wanting this, instead of engineering for all America, he was captain of a huckleberry party. . . .

“ Pounding beans is good to the end of pounding empires one of these days ; but if at the end of the years it is still only beans ! ”*

But though withdrawal from the world is induced in perhaps the greater number of cases by lack of energy to engage in its conflicts, or lack of inner strength to support its ever-recurring disappointments and deep sadness, the motive often bears a positive character, is of a religious or philosophical nature. The realization of the triviality and transitoriness of this life leads to the decision to negate the present for the consideration of the inner life and of an eternal world. This ideal has found its fullest expression in the anchorites of the Roman Catholic Church and the ascetics of the Orient. Yet, though the institution of monasticism in the East and in the West alike has its origin in the conception of the significance of Life, of Time and Eternity, of the Divine and His relation to man, there is a marked difference between the conception of the Christian monk and that of the Brahman. To the Catholic recluse God is a distinct personality, so concrete, indeed, that he can be represented in images which become objects of passionate and personal love. For the Brahman, on the contrary, God is the Impersonal, the All-pervading, the whole world, himself—the All. The next world, for the sake of which the Catholic saint renounces this, is almost tangible, a world like this world but without sorrow, perfect and endless. For the Brahman the very thought of such a heaven is error and sin. For between the ideals themselves a funda-

* H. A. Page, “ Thoreau, His Life and Aims.” P. 257.

mental difference exists. The Christian ascetic mortifies the flesh that the soul may win the upper hand and develop itself into perfection fit for fellowship with the Divine throughout Eternity. He conceives of this purified soul as retaining its identity and existing in individual form in the next world, possibly even in the same body, after the Resurrection from the dead. The Brahman, on the other hand, seeks not to develop his personality in any sense, but to lose it; to free himself from everything pertaining to individual existence, and so at last be absorbed into the Principle of Existence itself; to lose all consciousness of separate personality in perfect oneness with the Universal.

Thoreau's motive for withdrawal from the world was of such a religious—or it may be called philosophical—character, as that which led the Brahman to find his highest realization in self-negation; and the study of Hindoo philosophy was an important factor in framing Thoreau's whole conception of life.

It will be the purpose of this study to present a systematic consideration of his philosophy of life, together with an examination into its points of correspondence with Hindoo Philosophy.

II.—Acquaintance with Hindoo Literature.

In 1837 Thoreau became acquainted with Emerson,* who first drew his attention to the literature of the Orient. †

His first book, "A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers," written in 1839, contains many such references to Hindoo Philosophy as the following:

"In comparison with the philosophy of the East, we may say that modern Europe has yet given birth to none. Beside the vast and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat Geeta, even our Shakespeare seems sometimes youthfully green and commonplace merely. . . . *Ex Oriente lux* may still be the

* v. F. B. Sanborn, "Henry D. Thoreau." P. 180.

† v. J. R. Lowell, "Thoreau," "My Study Windows." P. 144.

motto of scholars, for the Western world has not yet derived from the East all the light which it is destined to receive thence." *

Concerning the lack of understanding in the modern world of the profound thought of the East, he writes :

"Tried by a New England eye or the mere practical wisdom of modern times, they (the Hindoo Scriptures) are the oracles of a race already in its dotage ; but held up to the sky, which is the only impartial and incorruptible appeal, they are of a piece with its depth and serenity, and I am assured that they will have a place and significance as long as there is a sky to test them by." †

During the years of his life alone in Walden Woods, he gave much time to the study of the Hindoo Scriptures, as such records as the following in "Walden" show :

"In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat Geeta, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny ; and I doubt if that philosophy is not to be referred to a previous state of existence, so remote is its sublimity from our conceptions." ‡

So great was his interest in Hindoo literature that his friend Cholmondely on returning to England, sent him from there, as the most acceptable gift, forty-four volumes, "in English, French, Latin and Sanskrit," concerning which Thoreau wrote to his friend Mr. Daniel Ricketson : §

"But I wish now above all to inform you that Cholmondely has gone to the Crimea, but that before he left he busied himself in buying, and has caused to be forwarded to me by Chapman, a royal gift in the shape of twenty-one distinct works (one in nine volumes—forty-four volumes in all) almost exclusively relating to ancient Hindoo literature and scarcely

* "Week," p. 186. (The "Week" was, however, not published till 1849.) Cf., also "Week," p. 184.

† "Weeks," p. 196.

‡ "Walden," p. 459.

§ Written Dec. 25, 1855 ; v. "Letters," p. 320.

one of them to be bought in America. I am familiar with many of them and know how to prize them. I send you information of this as I might of the birth of a child."

It was inevitable that this constant study of Hindoo philosophy, this very living and breathing in its atmosphere, should influence Thoreau's manner of thought and be an important factor in moulding his philosophy of life.

He himself acknowledges that the life of the Brahman possesses a fascination for him :

"It is the attitude of this men more than any communication which they make that attracts us. The very austerity of the Brahmans is tempting to a devotional soul." *

He found a certain satisfaction in the thought that his own mode of life at Walden, in its details, would bear comparison with theirs :

"It was fit that I should live on rice mainly, who loved so well the philosophy of India." †

He recognizes, too, the tremendous influence of the Hindoo manner of thought on his mind and spirit in such a record as the following in "Walden:"

"To be intoxicated with a single glass of wine! I have experienced that pleasure when I have drunk the liquor of the esoteric doctrines." ‡

We have, farther, a clue to those works which made the greatest impression upon him. In a letter to Mrs. B. B. Wiley, of Chicago, dated Dec. 12th, 1856, he specifies :

"The best, I think, are the Bhagvat Geeta (an episode in an ancient heroic poem called the Mahabarat §), the Vedas, the Vishnu Purana and the Institutes of Menu. ||

* "Week," p. 198.

† "Walden," p. 97.

‡ Cited by Thoreau from Mîr Camar Uddîn Mast. Walden, p. 157.

§ Written by Krishna Dwaipayana, the arranger of the Vedas.

|| Letters, p. 351.

III.—Conception of God.

I. GOD AS FIRST CAUSE.

In common with all formulated religions, the Brahminical held the conception of a First cause, a Creator of the world, "from which the All derives its life." * The God Krishna announces concerning himself :

"I am the creation of the Universe.

"I am the eternal seed of all nature." †

In the Vishnu Purana God is designated as :

"The cause of the cause, the cause of the cause of the cause, the cause of them all" ‡

Thoreau also conceives of God as Creator of the world, man's maker :

"I delight to come to my bearings, not walk with pomp and parade in a conspicuous place, but to walk even with the *Builder of the Universe* if I may." § "Has not he (God) done his work and made man?" ||

2. GOD AS PRESERVER.

The creator of the Universe is, in its existence, its preserver. In the Vishnu Purana praise is offered "To him who as Brahma, creates the Universe, who in its existence is its *preserver*." ¶

He regards his creation with love. The race of men is denominated in the Vedas, "Sons of the Immortal." ** The All-Knowing First Being is not our enemy, but our relative and father, who cares for us. †† "As *friends* we pray to thee. We, mortals, to God." ‡‡ In the Bhagvat Geeta the young Arjoon thus addresses the God :

* Rigveda, 10, 12, p. 90 ; cf. also Yajur v. Mahâ-Nara Upan, 11, 4, p. 241.

† Bhagvat Geeta, p. 36.

‡ Vishnu Purana, p. 73.

§ Walden, p. 508.

|| Autumn, p. 100.

¶ Vishnu Purana, p. 141.

** Max Müller, Sacred Books, vol xv., ii, 5, p. 240.

†† Deussen, Yajur-Veda, Çvet-Upan, p. 295.

‡‡ Hymnen des Sama-Veda, p. 216 (i, 8). "Als Freunde flehen wir zu dir. Zum Gotte Menschen wir."

“ For thou shouldst bear with me even as a *father* with his son, a *friend* with his friend, a *lover* with his beloved, O Krishna, Jadava, Friend.” *

The idea of the loving care of God for his creation finds frequent expression in Thoreau :

“ As a mother loves to see her children take nourishment and expand, so God loves to see *his children* thrive on the nutriment he has provided for them.” †

The discerning will not fail to recognize his relationship to the all-pervading spirit :

“ The *seer* will speak of ‘ the Earths ’ and his *father* who is in them.” ‡

3. GOD AS IMMANENT CREATOR.

This First Cause of the Universe is not, however, conceived of by the Hindoo philosopher as something *apart from* his creation. The world is but a manifestation of him and he exists *in it*.

“ Alles was ist, das Weltganze. Was sichtbar und was horbar ist. Dies Alles aussen und innen *umfasst, durchdringt* Narayama.” || God is immanent in his creation :

“ Thou art the *heart* of all creatures and all that has been or will be emanates from thee, O universal Spirit ! *This whole world from Brahma to a tree thou art.*” §

Every natural phenomena is but an expression of God, the All.

“ The God who is in the fire, the God who is in the water, the God who has entered into the whole world, the God who is in the plants, the God who is the trees, adoration be to that God, adoration !” **

* Bhagvat Geeta, p. 58.

† Winter, p. 228.

‡ Week, p. 504.

|| Yajur-ved. Mahâ-Naray-Up, 11, 4. Deussen, p. 251. All that exists, the entire Universe, all that is visible and audible, Narajama envelopes and penetrates.

§ Vishnu Purana, p. 559.

** Yajur-ved. Çvet-Upan, ii, 21, 11. Max Müller, Vol. XV, p. 243.

The Bhagvat Geeta emphasizes the importance of perception of the immanence of the Eternal in all things alike :

“The learned behold him (the Almighty) alike in the reverend Brahman perfected in knowledge, in the ox and in the elephant, in the dog and in him who eateth of the flesh of dogs. Those whose minds are fixed on this equality gain eternity even in this world. They put their trust in Brahma, the Eternal, because *he is everywhere alike*.”*

To Thoreau, also, had insight been given to recognize the Eternal as existing in all things .

“The common man will speak with reverence of the heavens, but the seer will speak of ‘the earths’ and his father who is *in* them.”†

The search after fuller perception of this indwelling God even becomes his business in life :

“My profession is *to find God in nature*.”‡

On his walks he communes with the spirit which pervades all phenomena of the natural world :

“It is as if I always met in those places some grand, serene, immortal, infinitely encouraging though invisible, companion and walked with him.”||

4. GOD IDENTICAL WITH NATURE.

Since in all nature, in each single phenomenon, God dwells as its cause, it follows that all things are emanations of this indwelling Spirit, manifestations of the Omnipresent One, and, therefore, that God and the Universe—or Nature—are one and the same. This identity is expressed with great frequency in the sacred books of the East, from which I will therefore cite but the following representative passages :

“They who know true wisdom and whose minds are pure behold the whole world *as one with divine knowledge, as one with thee, O God!*”§

* Bhagvat Geeta, p. 27.

† Week, p. 504.

‡ Excursions, p. 439.

|| Winter, p. 151.

§ Vishnu Purana, p. 32.

The Veda further extolls the Eternal as :

“Hochster des Alls, *das All selber*, Ew'ger Narayami, Hari ; ja, Purusha ist dieses Weltall.” *

To see Nature with true perception is equivalent to seeing God—Krishna spake :

“Behold, O Arjoon, my million forms divine, of various species and diverse shapes and colors. Behold *in this my body the whole world animate and inanimate and all things else.*” †

In Thoreau's direct manner the same thought is expressed :

“May we not see God ? Is not *Nature rightly read that of which she is taken to be the symbol merely ?*” ‡

As the Hindoo characterizes fire, water, wind—all the powers or motions in nature—as God, so Thoreau :

“These motions everywhere in Nature must surely be the *circulation of God.*” ||

Interesting, too, is the following note in Thoreau's diary from Dec. 29, 1841 :

“God did not make the world in jest, no nor indifference.” It is God's world §—which might almost be a translation of the following passage from the Upanishads of the Vedas :

“Viele lassen die Weltschöpfung
Auf Wunsch Gottes allein entstehen—
Zum Genuss sich, zum Spielzeuge
Schuf sie Gott, meinen andere—
Nein, sie ist *Gottes selbst Wesen.*” **

* Yajur-ved. Mahâ-Naray, 11, 4. Deussen, p. 251 ; cf. also Rig-Veda, 10, 2, p. 90. “Highest of the All, *the All itself*, Eternal Narayana, Hari. Yes, Purusha is the whole world.”

† Bhagvat Geeta, p. 53.

‡ Week, p. 504.

|| Autumn, p. 430.

§ Winter, p. 52.

** Atharva-ved. Mand-Kar Up., 1, 3. Deussen, p. 579. Many consider that the creation of the world was the fulfilment of divine desire ;

The conception of God as immanent in all things, as identical with the Universe itself, must necessarily preclude restrictions of any nature of the Divine and so present the idea of

5. GOD WITHOUT LIMITATION OF PERSONALITY.

It follows, therefore, naturally and necessarily, that the ancient Hindoo religion should lack any representation of its God in art.*

Only when God is conceived of as possessing a definite form and distinct personality—as, for instance, of a human being or of an animal—can He be represented in art. Thus the gods of ancient Greece could take form in sculpture only when they had been incarnated in Greek poetry and conceived of as bearing the forms of perfect men, and Christian art could take its rise only after the great revivalists had revealed the Redeemer as Son of *Man*, as well as Son of God.

It was, however, foreign to the very fundamental idea and character of the Hindoo religion to restrict the *One* who is at the same time the *All* by attributing to him a definite—and therefore *limited*—personality. He is characterized as :

“Brahma, whose body is ether, whose nature is true, rejoicing in the senses, delighted in the mind, perfect in peace and immortal.” †

His worshipers strive to divest themselves of any lingering definiteness of conception. Brahma bears no resemblance to any single created thing :

others think that God created it for His pleasure, as a plaything. No, *it is God's very essence.*

It is interesting to compare the expression of thought in Whittier's “Andrew Rykman's Prayers :”

“Not through blind caprice of will,
Not by cunning slight of skill,
Not through sport of mind or force,
Hast Thou made Thy Universe ;
But as atmosphere and zone
Of thy loving heart alone.”

* See Schroeder ; “Indiens Kultur,” p. 80-85.

† Yajur-veda, Taitt-Upan, Max Müller, Vol. IV, p. 49 ; cf. Vishnu Purana, p. 73.

“That which cannot be seen or seized, which has no family and no caste, no eyes nor ears, no hands nor feet, the eternal, the omnipresent (all-pervading) infinitesimal, that which is imperishable, that it is which the wise regard as the source of all beings.”*

Thoreau is so impressed by the idea of the omnipresence and illimitability of the Divine Being, that he fears to limit the conception by applying to it a name :

“God reigns ! I say *God*. I am not sure that is the name. You will know who I mean.”†

The insistence with which the preachers and teachers harp upon the personality of God provokes him to sarcasm :

“The perfect God in his revelations of himself has never got the length of one such proposition as you, his prophets, state. Have you learned the alphabet of heaven and can you count three ? Do you know the number of God’s family ? Whose friend are you that you speak of God’s personality ?”‡

He who has really attained to perception will realize the unknowableness of the Supreme, the boundlessness of the Infinite. In illustration a parable, which I cite in full as expressing equally well Thoreau’s and the Brahminical view of the matter :

“A good and pious man reclined his head on the bosom of Contemplation and was absorbed in the ocean of a revery. At the instant when he awaked from his vision, one of his friends, by way of pleasantry, said : “What rare gifts have you brought us from that garden where you have been recreating ?” He replied : “I fancied to myself and said : When I can reach the rose-bower I will fill my lap with flowers and bring them as a present to my friends; but when I got there, the fragrance of the roses so intoxicated me that the skirt dropped from my hands. O bird of dawn ! . . . these vain pretenders are ignorant of him they seek after. O Thou ! who towerest above the flights of conjecture, opinion

* Atharva-Veda, Mund-upan, I, 1, 6. Max Müller, p. 28, Vol. I.

† Letter to H. Blake (1849). Letters, p. 214.

‡ Week, p. 88-89 ; cf. also Week, p. 98.

and comprehension, whatever has been reported of thee we have heard and read ; the congregation is dismissed and life drawn to a close and we still rest at our first enconium of thee !” *

IV.—Conception of Man.

I. MAN'S RELATION TO NATURE.

a. *Man One with Nature.*

As God is immanent in all things, man and nature are alike his manifestations ; therefore man must know the closeness of his relation to nature, amounting to absolute oneness in the Universal. Thus the Veda explains :

“ The Brahman . . . is the same as the ether which is around us ; and the ether which is around us is the same as the ether which is within us. And that ether which is within us, that is the ether within the heart. That ether in the heart (as Brahman) is omnipresent and unchanging.” †

The idea is expressed by Thoreau in very similar words :

“ Did not he that made that which is *within* make that which is *without* also ?” ‡

He who has attained to perception will not fail to recognize that the same elements are in all other natural objects which are in him ; that he is one with them.

“ Doch wer die Wesen hier alle
Wiedererkennt im eignen selbst,
Und sich in allem was lebet.
Der änstigt sich vor keinen mehr.” §

• To Thoreau oneness—identity—with Nature is oneness with the Spirit of Nature :

* Week, p. 99-100 ; cf. Vishnu Purana, p. 114.

† Sama-veda, Chand-Upan, 3, 12, 7, 8, 9. Max Müller, Vol. I, p. 46.

‡ Week, p. 504.

§ Yajurved, Ica-Up., 3. Deussen, p. 525. Yet he who recognizes all creatures here in himself and *himself in all that lives*, is troubled before none.

"I cannot come nearer to God and Heaven
 Than I live to Walden even
 I *am* its stony shore,
 And the breeze that passes o'er;
 In the hollow of my hand
 Are its water and its sand,
 And its highest resort
 Lies high in my thought." *

Almost a prayer is the longing for perfect oneness with Nature expressed in a letter to Mrs. Brown (July 21st, 1841):

"I *to be Nature*, looking into nature with such easy sympathy as the blue-eyed grass in the meadow looks into the face of the sky." †

b. Respect for plants and animals.

The perception that all creatures in Nature are manifestations of, and one with, the Divine, induces reverence before them as interpreters to man of the secrets of the Infinite. Thus the steer is represented in the Vedas as teacher of Salyakama, son of Jabala, and is addressed with the respect due a learned Brahman:

"The bull of the herd said to him, 'Salyakama!' He replied: 'Sir!' The bull said: ' . . . Lead us to the home of the teacher and I will declare to you one foot of Brahman.' 'Declare it, sir,' he replied." ‡

To Thoreau the animals were all companions whose communications were worthy to be heard:

"I hear faintly the cawing of a crow, far away echoing from the woodside. What a delicious sound! It is not merely crow calling to crow, for it speaks to me, too. *I am part of one great creature with him.*" §

The birds were messengers of the Most High:

"These migratory sparrows all *bear messages that concern my life.*" ||

* Walden, p. 303.

† Letters, p. 42.

‡ Samar Chand, 5, 1, 2, 7. Max Müller, Vol. I, p. 61.

§ Winter, p. 164.

|| Summer, p. 286.

"The sense of oneness with natural objects and the animals is often expressed in the language of human relationship.

Thus Thoreau addresses the "Queen of Night," the moon :

"My dear, my dewy *sister*, let thy dews descend on me," * and exclaims in his eulogy of the hardy little tree: "What *cousin* of mine is the scrub oak?" †

It is interesting to compare with such expressions remarks like the following, in Sakontala's conversation with her friends in the garden :

"Ich fühle wirklich die Neigung einer Schwester zu diesen jungen Pflanzen." ‡

c. Abstinence from meat-eating.

Out of the conception that plants and animals are emanations of the Divine and bear the closest relationship to man, follows naturally the anxiety not to injure any living thing, and its expression in the abstinence of the Hindoos from meat-eating. The Heetopades define religion as : "Compassion for all things that have life." || The Laws of Menu command abstinence from flesh-meat :

"Not a mortal exists more sinful than he who . . . desires to enlarge his own flesh with the flesh of another creature. . . . He who gives no creature willingly the pain of confinement or death, but *seeks the good of all sentient beings*, enjoys bliss without end." §

The Persian scriptures, too, take the same attitude with regard to the preservation of all life. The Zenda Vesta counsels the devout against the felling of trees, and gives a form of sacrifice to be offered when the injury of tree-life is unavoidable. **

* v. Sanborn, "H. D. Thoreau," p. 259.

† Autumn, p. 367.

‡ Sakontala, p. 9. "I really feel the inclination of a sister toward these young plants."

|| Heetopades of Veeshnoo Sama, p. 62.

§ Laws of Menu, p. 150-151 (46, 48, 52).

** v. Zenda Vesta, p. 188. Compare also the Buddhistic Suttas, p. 191.

Thoreau's extremely sensitive care not to injure any living thing is shown in the following record in his diary :

"Now is the time for chestnuts. A stone cast against the tree shakes them down in showers upon one's head and shoulders. But I cannot excuse myself for using the stone. I was affected as if I had cast a rock *at a sentient being*," * etc.

It is interesting, further, to note that Thoreau uses the same phrase, "sentient being," as is used in the passage from the Laws of Menu cited above. †

For Thoreau as naturally as for the Hindoos, abstinence from the eating of meat was an article of religion. He thus writes concerning it, citing at the same time the Vedas on the subject :

"Nevertheless I am far from regarding myself as one of those privileged to whom the Veda refers when it says that 'He who has true faith may eat all that exists, *i. e.*, is not bound to inquire what is his food or who prepares it.' " "And even in their case it is to be observed that a Hindoo commentary has remarked that the Vedant limits the privilege to times of distress." ‡

2. RELATION TO GOD.

As nature is one with God and *is* God, so is man one with God and

a. Identical with God.

The conception of man as one with the Divine Being—

* Autumn, p. 144-145 (Oct. 23d, 1855).

† Line 105, of the poem "Mountains" (v. "Poems of Nature," p. 101), read originally, "and seem to milk the sky." Margaret Fuller, to whom, as editor of the "Dial" the poem was sent, wrote Thoreau (Oct. 18th, 1841) : "Leave out, 'and seem' to milk the sky.' The image is too low. Mr. Emerson thought so, too." No doubt Thoreau got this expression from the "Laws of Menu." P. 5 (23), where Brahma is said to "*milk out*" the fire, air and sun. That Thoreau possessed the translation by Sir Wm. Jones from which I have quoted, is clear from Week, p. 162; cf. also the same expression, "Laws of Menu," p. 32 (76). Thoreau uses the expression, "I milk the sky and the earth," in his diary of Nov. 3d, 1853. Autumn, p. 203.

‡ Walden, p. 217; cf. "Laws of Menu," p. 150 (43).

the individual soul, as no other than the Universal soul—is very frequently expressed in the sacred book of the East :

“ He from whom all works, all desires, all sweet odors and tastes proceed, who embraces all this, who never speaks and who is never surprised, he, myself within the heart, he is that Brahman.*

When the wise man appears before the throne of Brahma the God will ask :

“ Who art thou ?” and he shall answer : “ I am a season and the child of the seasons, sprung from the womb of endless space, from the light (from the luminous Brahman). The light, the origin of the year, which is the past, which is the present, which is all living things and all elements, is the Self. *Thou art the self. What thou art that am I.*” †

A youth, Kabala, a descendant of Keishitaki, questioned the seer :

“ Yagnavalkya,” he said, “ tell me the Brahman which is visible, not invisible, the Self (atman) who is within all.” Yagnavalkya replied : “ This is *thy* Self who is within all.” ‡

This unity, or rather identity, of God and man, finds unmistakable expression in Thoreau :

“ I see, smell, taste, hear, feel that everlasting Something to which we are allied, at once our Maker, our Abode, our Destiny, *our very selves.*” || —

From an ethical point of view, this gives him courage to

* Sama-Veda, Chand-Upan, 3, 14, 4, Max Müller, Vol. I, p. 48.

† Rig-Veda, Kaush-Upan, 1, 6. Max Müller, Vol. I, Part I, p. 278.

‡ Yajur-Veda, Brih-Upan, 4, 1. Müller, Vol. XV, p. 128. The foot note to Max Müller runs : Deussen translates : “ Das inmanente, nicht transcendente Brahman,” which is right but too modern.

|| Week, p. 226. The same thought is beautifully expressed in Longfellow's translation of the Aphorisms of Johannes Scheffler (Angelus Silesius) which Thoreau may have known, as the translation was made in 1839 :

“ Pray'st thou how looks my God?
Go and thyself behold ;
Who sees himself in God,
Sees God's own very mould.”

recognize how entirely he must depend upon himself and, at the same time, how certainly his resources are equal to the demands made upon them, since he is one with the All-powerful :

“ There is something proudly thrilling in the thought that this obedience to conscience and trust in God which is so solemnly preached in extremities and arduous circumstances, is only a retreat to one's self and reliance on one's own strength.” *

This inner, metaphysical self revealed itself through the eyes, the “ windows of the soul.”

“ The person that is seen in the eye, that is the Self. This is the immortal, the fearless, this is Brahman.” †

To Thoreau it seemed that if his fellow man were conscious of his oneness with the Infinite soul, and let the whole power of that soul reveal itself, he would be as unable to support the revelation as were the children of Israel, who could not look upon the face of Moses after his communion with the Eternal One upon Mount Sinai :

“ To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet seen a man who was quite awake. How could I have looked him in the face ?” ‡

The lack of understanding on the part of scientific men, who pretend to get at the secret of life itself moves him to the sharp criticism :

“ Men of science when they pause to contemplate the power, wisdom and goodness of God, or as they sometimes call him, “ The Almighty Designer,” speak of him *as a total stranger*, whom it is necessary to treat with the highest consideration. They seem suddenly to have lost their wits.” §

The Hindoo regarded even the faintest glimmer of perception that the Eternal is not a stranger but a man's own self, as a great advance in spiritual life :

“ Then he (the Brahman) said to them all : ‘ You eat your

* Winter. p. 279.

† Sama-Veda, Chan-Upan, 4, 15, 1. Max Müller, I, p. 67.

‡ Walden, p. 142 ; cf. also Spring, p. 138.

§ Spring, p. 91.

food knowing that Vaisvanara Self as if it were many. But he who worships the Vaisvanara Self as a span long as *identical with himself*, he eats the food in all worlds, in all beings in all selfs.' " *

b. Dualism.

Yet in spite of the frequent expressions of the Brahman's absolute oneness with the Universal, a sense of dualism, of division yet to be overcome, is ever present. Often we find after such an avowal of faith as :

"He (who is) my self within the heart, is that Brahman."

In the very next line :

"(And) when I shall have departed from hence I shall obtain that self." †

This oneness is then not complete, but even now in process of becoming :

"Das Wesen in sich selbst schanend,
Das Wesen in der Aussenwelt,
Zu ihm werdend, in ihm ruhend,
Halt er treu an dem Wesen fest." ‡

Thoreau, too, enjoys but ecstatic moments when he is fully one with Nature and God ; the serenity of complete and assured oneness is not yet reached :

"I fear we are such Gods or demi-gods merely as fauns and satyrs, the divine allied to beasts." §

Oft despair and hope are mingled in an outburst of longing for perfect union with the Universal :

"Why were my ears given to hear those everlasting strains which haunt my life and yet to be profaned by these perpetual dull sounds? . . . Why, God, did you include me in your great scheme? *Will you not make me a partner at last ?*" ||

* Sama-Veda, Upan-Chand, 5, 18, 1. Max Müller, I, p. 88.

† Sama-Veda, Upan-Chand, 3, 14, 4. Max Müller, I, p. 48.

‡ Atharva-Veda, Mand-Kar, 2, 38, Deussen, p. 587. "Seeing the Essence in himself and in the outer world, becoming one with it, resting in it, he holds fast to the Essence."

§ Walden, p. 342.

|| Spring, p. 112.

The realization of such a partnership is the mainspring of his life. He himself gives it as the reason for his withdrawal to Walden Woods :

“I wished to ally myself to the powers that rule the Universe, to live as far away as a man can think.” *

What is then the significance of this consciousness of Identity with God, which at the same time is a consciousness of a lack of perfect Oneness with God? Thoreau quotes a Hindoo story in explanation :

“I have read in a Hindoo book that there was a king’s son, who, being expelled in infancy from his native city, was brought up a forester, and, growing up to maturity in that state, imagined himself to belong to the barbarous race with which he lived. One of his father’s ministers having discovered him, revealed to him what he was and the misconception of his character was removed and he knew himself to be a prince.

“So soul,” continues the Hindoo philosopher, “from the circumstances in which it is placed, mistakes its own character, until the truth is revealed to it by some holy teacher, and then it knows itself to be Brahma.” †

c. Original Sinlessness.

The figure is already interpreted for us. The soul is of kingly origin, heaven-born, one with the Divine Father. As identical with the Perfect One, the soul was originally perfect, pure and sinless.

“The beings . . . created by Brahma were at first *endowed with righteousness* and perfect faith, . . . their hearts were *free from guile*, they were *pure*, etc.” ‡

The Vedas affirms :

“Alle seelen sind *ursprünglich*,
Frei von Dunkel und Fleckenlos
Urerweckt schon und uerelost.” §

* Walden, p. 342.

† Walden, p. 151, 152.

‡ Vishnu Purana, p. 45.

§ Atharva-Veda Mand.-Upan, v. 98. Deussen, p. 604. All souls are originally free from darkness and spotless, awakened and redeemed from the beginning. Cf. Deussen, Geschichte der, Philosophie I, p. 310.

Thoreau, too, held the doctrine of original sinlessness :

“How careful we must be to keep *the crystal well we are made clear!*” *

He holds the true self to be absolutely incapable of sin and not responsible for the deeds of the unreal, worldly self :

“A great soul *will not consider its sins as its own*, but be more absorbed in the prospect of that valor and virtue for the future which is more properly itself than in these improper actions which, *by being sins, discover themselves to be not itself.*” †

An interesting passage in the Zenda Vesta forms a parallel to this :

“All good thoughts, words and works are done knowingly ; all bad thoughts, words and actions are not done knowingly.” ‡

d. Sin.

This, then, is the meaning and significance of sin. As the king's son in the far country forgot his origin and considered himself merely a barbarian, man's soul in the world has lost sight of its original Oneness with the Divine. This is the Vedic conception of sin :

“Ihr kennt ihn nicht der diese Welt gemacht hat ; *ein andere schob sich zwischen euch und ihm.*” §

The Vishnu Purana explains the advent of sin in the world thus :

“ . . . After awhile . . . that portion of Hari which has been described as Kala (Time) *infused into created beings sin.*” ||

Thoreau's definition of sin is in the same strain :

“Sin, I am sure, is not in overt acts nor indeed in acts of

* Autumn, p. 153.

† Winter, p. 144.

‡ Zenda Vesta, Vol. III, p. 19.

§ Rig-Veda, 10, 31. Deussen, p. 139. “Ye know not Him who has made this world ; another shoved himself between you and Him.”

|| Vishnu Purana, p. 45 ; cf. also, p. 47. Thoreau uses the same word, “Time,” the Hari of the Vishnu Purana.

any kind, but is in proportion to that *time* which has come behind us and displaced eternity, to the degree in which our elements are mixed with the elements of earth." *

3. PURPOSE OF LIFE.

It was then the highest purpose—the *only* meaning—of life for the Hindoo devotee, to free himself from the delusion of Time and the world, to realize to the full his Oneness with Brahma—that is, otherwise expressed—to *refind* his true self :

" *The Self which is free from sin*, free from old age, from death and grief, from hunger and thirst, which desires nothing but what it ought to desire and imagines nothing but what it ought to imagine, it is which we must search out, that *it is which* we must try to understand." †

This idea appears in Thoreau clothed in mystical language :

"I will only hint at some of the enterprise I have cherished. I long ago lost a hound, a bay horse and a turtle dove, and am still on their trail." ‡

To this "*self*" is granted the perception of the One in All—"the pure in heart shall see God."

"When a man's nature has become purified by the serene light of knowledge, then he sees him, meditating on him as without parts." §

Thoreau expressed frequently the thought that absolute purity of heart and mind is the source of that pure Vision which can even discern the Infinite :

"Man flows at once to God when the channel of purity is open." || "Chastity is perpetual acquaintance with the All." **

The Hindoo philosophy does not, however, consider this perception of God as perception of something outside of, or

* Winter, p. 25.

† Samaveda, Chan-Upan, 8, 7, 1. Max Müller, Vol. I, p. 134.

‡ Walden, p. 29.

§ Atharva Veda, Mund-Upan, 3, 1, 8. Max Müller, Vol. XV, p. 39.

|| Walden, p. 353.

** Walden, p. 342.

apart from, a man's self. The soul recognizes itself to be Brahma; the dualism vanishes; the individual is absorbed into the Universal spirit:

"As the flowing rivers disappear in the sea, losing their name and their form, thus a wise man, freed from name and form, goes to the Divine Person, who is greater than the great."*

Thoreau, too, is possessed by an intense longing to free himself from all foreign elements, and lose himself in the ocean of the Universal:

"Fain would I stretch me by the mountain side,
To thaw and trickle with the melting snow,
That, mingled soul and body with the tide,
I, too, may through the pores of nature flow."†

The aim of life in this world is, then, for Thoreau as for the Brahman, to regain that purity of soul which he possessed originally as one with the Great Spirit, before taking on this individual form, to purge the soul of the delusion of a separate existence, that, free from all consciousness of an individual self, which consciousness is sin (as disharmony), he may be absorbed into the Universal.

The whole course of progress to the perception of the Real is one of abstraction of the mind from the things which are but apparent; of renunciation of all that pertains to the apparent or material life and is the consciousness of individuality, for the attainment of the purely spiritual. It is the resolution of the finite into the Infinite.

4. CONDITIONS OF FULFILLING LIFE'S PURPOSE.

a. Negation of (the apparent) Self.

The first condition of realization of the true self is therefore the negation of the apparent self. The father of Pratrika taught his son that renunciation is the highest.‡

* Atharva Veda, Mund-Upan, 3, 2, 8. Max Müller, Vol. XV, p. 41; cf. Deussen, *Gesch d. Phil.* II, p. 317.

† Winter, p. 156.

‡ Yajur-Veda, Brih-Upan. Deussen *Einleitung*, 5, 12, p. 495. Max Müller, Vol. XV, p. 194.

"A mortal who has heard this and embraced it, who has separated from it all qualities and has thus reached the subtle Being rejoices, because he has obtained what is a cause for rejoicing." *

Thoreau makes the same distinction between the external, *seeming* self and the real self:

"Do you separate distinctly enough the support of your *body* from that of your *essence*?" †

If we but cease to devote all our energies to caring for this individual, we shall be like undisturbed water able to reflect eternal reality:

"When was it that men agreed to respect the appearance and not the reality? Why should the appearance appear? When we are weary with the burden of life, why do we not lay down this load of falsehoods which we have volunteered to sustain and be refreshed as never mortal was? . . . Let things alone, let them weigh what they will, let them soar or fall. To succeed in letting one thing alone—what an achievement! Methinks it lightens through the dusky universe.

. . . *If for a moment we made way with our petty selves, what shall we not reflect!*" ‡

*Yajur-Veda, Kath-Upan, 1, 2, 13. Max Müller, Vol. XV, p. 10.

† Letter to H. Blake (1849). Letters, p. 18.

‡ Letter to H. Blake (1849), p. 213-14. This entire renunciation of self excludes all anxiety about the well-being of the personal self; it, therefore, negates care and sorrow. Of the Hindoo Yogi it is written:

"Von ihm weicht alle Wehklage, weicht

In ihm ist keine Sorge mehr,

Ganz befriedigt, mit Licht eins, ist,

Festes, furchtloses Sinnes er."

(Artharva-Veda, Mand-Ka, 3, 37. Deussen, p. 591.)

"All plaints of sorrow are foreign to him, in him there is no care, entirely satisfied, one with light, he is firm and fearless in mind."

There is, therefore, no place in Thoreau's scheme of life for a Philosophy of Sorrow. Grief exists only through lack of understanding of, or harmony with, the designs of the Universal. "Every man casts a shadow, not his body only but his *imperfectly mingled spirit*. *That is his grief*." (Week, p. 315.) In the fullest faith and resignation peace is to be found:

"I must receive my life as passively as the willow-leaf that flutters

That this negation of self demands retirement from the world to a life of absolute seclusion will be considered in detail in another section ; I will here only cite a record from Thoreau's diary from the year 1841, in which year the project of the hermitage seems first to have taken form in his mind :

" I want to go soon and live away by the pond where I shall hear only the wind whispering among the reeds. It will be success enough *if I have left myself behind.*"*

b. Negation of the World.

The renunciation of the external and apparent carries with it as inner necessity the negation of all worldly aspirations. The world is a hindrance in the struggle towards perfection as it continually distracts from the contemplation of the soul's high destiny and presents motives which appeal to egotism, to the desire for present realization of the apparent self. Hence the Vedas consider entire withdrawal from the world a necessity of spiritual life.† Krishna, too, warns the young Arjoon against the infection of worldliness :

" The busy world is engaged from other motives than the worship of the Deity. Abandon, then, O Son of Koon tee all selfish motives and perform thy duty to me alone."‡

This was one of Thoreau's messages to America :

" I think, there is nothing, not even crime, more opposed to poetry, to philosophy, ay, to life itself than this incessant business."§

Over and over he gives expression to the highest principle which governs his life :

over the brook. I must not be for myself, but for God's work and that is always good. I will await the breeze patiently and grow as they shall determine. . . . *I feel as if I could at any time resign my life and the responsibility into God's hands and become as innocent and free from care as a plant or stone.*" (Spring, p. III.)

* Winter, p. 13.

† v. Iabala-Upan, p. 460.

‡ Bhagvat Geeta, p. 15.

§ Miscellanies, p. 255.

"I must not be for myself, but for God's work."*

"I must not live for it (the world) but in it for the Gods, they are my correspondent.†

The serenity of such a life will permit insight into the eternal truths :

"What are three-score years and ten hurriedly lived ; to moments of divine leisure *when your life is coincident with the life of the Universe.*"‡

Avoidance of Disturbing Influences.

The Vedas counsel holding the soul aloof from all external influences :

"As rain-water that has fallen on a mountain ridge runs down the rocks on all sides, thus does he who sees a difference between qualities run after them on all sides. "As pure water poured into pure water, remains the same, thus O Gautama, is the self of a thinker who knows."§

Thoreau held the receiving of many impressions from without to be but a waste of force :

"Do not seek so anxiously to be developed, to subject yourself to so many influences, to be played upon. *It is all dissipation.* ||

(a) Solitude.

To secure this freedom from distraction it is necessary to be much alone. The Bhagvat Geeta defines wisdom :

"Wisdom is a constant and invariable worship paid to me alone, *worshipping in a private place and a dislike to the society of men.*"**

It is interesting to note that the teaching of Buddha also lays particular stress upon this point :

* Letters, p. 213 ; cf. Confucius saying : "The wise man busies himself not with worldly matters." v. Analects, III. p. 27.

† Winter, p. 350.

‡ Winter, p. 45.

§ Yajur-Veda, Kath-Upan, 14, 15, Max Müller, Vol XV. p. 17

|| Walden, p. 326.

** Bhagvat Geeta, p. 65.

"Let him (the wise man) be devoted to that quietude which comes from within, let him not drive back the ecstasy of contemplation, let him look through things, *let him be much alone.*"*

Thoreau found solitude a necessity of his fullest, most perfect life. Thus he writes in his diary :

I thrive best on solitude. If I have had a companion only one day in a week, I find that the value of the week to me has been seriously affected. It dissipates my days, etc.'†

The presence of others hindered the mystic perception of the inner soul behind all phenomena :

"I saw through and behind them (the white pines) to a distant snow-clad hill, and also to oaks red with their dry leaves and maple limbs mingled with the pines. I was on the verge of seeing something, but I did not. *If I had been alone . . . I might have had something to report.*"‡

(f) Silence.

The Hindoo sage in his isolation does not interrupt the highest communion with the eternal self by any speech or sound :

"Höher ist, als die Grundsilbe
Der Punkt, höher als er der Hall,
Die Silbe mit dem Laut schwindet,
Lautlos die höchste Stätte ist."§

Thoreau, too, has his doctrine of silence :

"As the truest society approaches always nearer to solitude, so *the most excellent speech falls into silence.* . . Silence is when we hear inwardly, sound when we hear outwardly. Who has not heard her infinite din ! She is Truth's speaking-trumpet, for through her all revelations have been made."||

*Akankhenya Sutta, p. 210 : cf. "Confucius," p. 27.

†(Dec. 28th, 1856), Winter p. 49 : cf. also p. 354.

‡Winter, p. 150.

§ Dhyam, 4. Deussen Gesch. der Philos., 1, p. 351. "Higher than the ground syllable (Om) is the point, higher than that the sound, the syllable vanishes with the tones, the highest is soundlessness."

|| Week, p. 515-6.

He would hold his life as secluded as that of a Hindoo devotee ;

"What is fame to a living man. If he live aright the sound of no man's voice will resound through the aisles of his secluded life. . . . *His life will be a hallowed silence, a pool.*"*

Silence is natural when the mind is fixed in contemplation :

"*Silence is the communication of a conscious soul with itself.* If the soul attend for a moment to its own infinity, there is silence."† When deeper thoughts upswell, the jarring discord of harsh speech is hushed, and senses seem as little as may be to share the ecstasy."‡

c. *Negation of Desire.*

Negation of the apparent self includes the mortifying of every desire which characterizes that self. The Eternal One, than which there is none other, is free from all desire, all passion ; on the realization of man's oneness with him, the Infinite, follows the death of desire. Poverty of worldly goods is, of course, implied. Thoreau chose it as voluntarily as the Indian ascetic. Though his religion only required of the Brahman that he withdraw to a solitary life in the forest after he had fulfilled his duty as founder of a family, yet the Veda relates concerning the sages :

"What shall we do with offspring, they said, we who have this Self and this world (of Brahman)? And they, having risen above the desire for sons, wealth and new worlds, wander about as mendicants."§

This negation of every human passion is essential to perception :

"He who hath faith findeth wisdom, and above all he *who hath gotten the better of his passions.*" ||

* Spring, p. 128-9.

† Autumn, p. 435.

‡ Summer; p. 348.

§ Yajur-Veda, Brih-Upan, IV, 4, 22. Max Müller, Vol. XV, p. 179-80.

|| Bhagvat Geeta, p. 24 ; cf. also, "Laws of Menu," p. 186 (96).

This is indeed the very definition of wisdom :

“ A man is said to be confirmed in wisdom when *he forsaketh every desire* which entereth his heart, and of himself is happy and contented in himself.” *

The Vedas declare this mastery of self to be the only true knowledge :

“ The mind, it is said, is of two kinds, pure or impure ; impure from the contact with lust, pure when free from lust.

. . . The mind (manas, desire) must be restrained in the heart till it comes to an end—that is knowledge, that is liberty.” †

The Heetopades of Vishnu Sarma even go so far as to characterize self-restraint as the distinguishing quality of soul :

“ What hath he to do with a soul who doth not keep his passions in subjection ?” ‡

Thoreau, too, considered freedom from desire the “ flowering of man : ”

“ He is blessed who is assured that *the animal is dying out* in him day by day and the Divine being established.” §

He quotes from the Vedas, with his endorsement :

“ *A command over our passions* and over the external senses of the body and good acts are declared by the Ved to be indispensable in the mind’s approximation of God. Yet the spirit can for the time, pervade and control every member of the body and transmute what in form is grossest sensuality into purity and devotion.” ||

d. Negation of Works.

In the complete giving up of self, not only must the evil in man be annihilated, but even good works carry a danger with them, in that they are an assertion of individuality, and form an obstacle to uninterrupted contemplation of the Universal :

* Bhagvat Geeta, p. 12.

† Maitr-Upan, 6, 34. Max Müller, Vol. XV, p. 333-4.

‡ Heetopades, p. 22.

§ Essays, p. 242.

|| Walden, p. 342.

"Because those who depend on good works are, owing to their passions, improvident, they fall and become miserable when their life is finished. Considering sacrifice and good works as the best, these fools know no higher good and having enjoyed their reward on the height of the heaven gained by good works, they enter again this world or a lower one."*

To Thoreau the occupation with good works was indescribably petty and trivial in comparison with life's true purpose which must be all-absorbing :

"What a foul subject is this of doing good ! Instead of *mind*ing one's life which should be his business. . . . As if the sun should stop when he had kindled his fires up to the splendor of a man, or a star of the sixth magnitude and go about like a Robin Goodfellow peeping in at every cottage window . . . instead of increasing his genial heat and beneficence till he is of such brightness that no mortal can look him in the face ; and, then, in the meantime, too, going about the world in his own orbit doing it good, or, rather, as a truer philosophy has discovered, the world going about him getting good." †

So much energy spent in *doing* leaves none for *being* :

"Even the wisest and best are apt to use their lives as the occasion to do something else than to *live* greatly. *What a man does compared with what he is, is a small part.*" ‡

Thoreau quotes, further, from the Bhagvat Geeta concerning

. . . "The forsaking of works taught by Krishna to the first of men. In wisdom is to be found every work without exception." §

To him who has attained to wisdom, the uselessness of works are apparent. The Veda teaches :

* Mund-Upan, 1, 9, 10. Max Müller, Vol. XV, p. 32.

† Walden, p. 117.

‡ Spring, p. 248.

§ Week, p. 118.

"All works, the good as well as the bad, become as nothing when wisdom is attained." *

(a) *Faith.*

This wisdom is the perfection of insight of which the fruit and source alike is faith.

"When one believes, one perceives. One who does not believe, does not perceive. Only he who believes, perceives."†

For the next world—as for this—works effect but little in comparison with this supreme faith through which knowledge of the eternal is attained;

"Those who in the forest follow faith and austerities go to light and from light to day, . . . This is the path of the Devas. But they who, living in a village, practice sacrifices, works of public utility, and alms, they go to the smoke, from smoke to night."‡

To Thoreau, also, Faith appeared of infinitely more value than works :

"I think we may safely *trust* a great deal more than we do."§

~ "Faith indeed is all the reform that is needed, it is in itself a reform."||

"In the serene sky of evening he sees a picture of what his life should be ;

"Just such a piece of art merely, infinitely sweet and good, did it appear to me, and *just as little were any active duties required of me.*"**

Divine moments of perception of the supreme were granted to him through perfect faith, which is the full yielding up of self :

* Mund-Upan, 2, 2, 8. Max Müller XV., p. 37, also Yajur-Veda, Kath-Upan, 6, 12, p. 23. "The fetter of the heart is broken, all doubts are solved, all his works (and their effects) perish, when he has been beheld who is high and low."

† Sama-Veda Chan-Upan 7, 19, 1, p. 122. Max Müller, Vol. I.

‡ Sama-Veda, Chand-Upan 5, 12, 3. Max Müller, Vol I, p. 80.

§ Walden, p. 19.

|| Miscellanies, p. 63.

** Autumn, p. 197.

"Sometimes in a summer morning, I sat in my sunny doorway till noon, rapt in a reverie, among the pines and hickories and sumachs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness. I grew in those seasons like corn in the night. . . . I realized what the Orientals mean by contemplation and the forsaking of works."*

The forsaking of works was indeed a necessity to that "reclining on the bosom of contemplation" which the Hindoo worshipper considered the chief means of attaining to oneness with the All—that absolute concentration which is tantamount to death of the outer senses that the inner (spiritual) senses may be free to perceive the invisible world Thoreau had in some degree experienced this, for he records:

"Drifting on a sultry day on the sluggish waters of the pond, I almost *cease to live and begin to be*.†

(b) *The Yoga.*

The highest exercise of this power of abstraction is the practice of the Yoga.‡

Thoreau writes concerning it :§

"The Yogi, absorbed in contemplation, contributes in his degree to creation ; he breathes a divine perfume, he hears wonderful things. Divine forms traverse him without tearing him and, united to the nature which is proper to him, he goes, he acts as animating original matter.|| To some extent and at rare intervals, *I, too, am a Yogi*. Free in this world as the birds of the air, disengaged from every kind of chain those

* Walden, p. 175.

† Spring p. 316.

‡ Concerning the almost incredible power of abstraction possessed by the Hindoo devotees see Warren Hastings letter for the preface of the *Bhagvat Geeta*, Wilkin's Translation.

§ cf. Yogat, 1 Dhyamat 3 ; Deussen, *Gesch. der Phil.*, I, p. 354.

|| cf. Creuzer-Guignauts characterization of the Yoga practice.

"C'est l'oubli de tout individualité : c'est le renoncement le plus complet au moi," (*Religions de l'Antiquité* : Vol I, p. 281).

who have practiced the Yoga find in Brahma the certain fruit of their works. Depend upon it that, rude and careless as I am, *I would fain practice the Yoga faithfully.*"*

The complete giving up of all bodily and even mental faculties and permitting self to lose itself in the All, appeared to Thoreau as a direct path "making for righteousness."

"My most essential progress must be to me a state of *absolute rest.*"† Time's stream seems settling in a pool, a stillness not as if Nature's breath were held, but expired, *Let me know that such hours are the wealthiest in Nature's gift.*"‡

We have seen that the Hindoo ideal of life was, by complete renunciation of self and all that pertains to individual existence to regain harmony with the Universal spirit of which he is an emanation. Therein he finds the soul-cleansing, pristine purity, perfection.

The consideration in the foregoing sections showing that Thoreau possessed the same ideal of life, makes his withdrawal out of the world seem as inevitable an outcome of his faith as the life of the Brahminical ascetic in the Indian forest.

V.—Immortality.

I. DEATH-METAMORPHOSIS.

The faith in its Oneness with the Universal mind, precluded from the Hindoo mind any thought of real death or dissolution. Death could only mean for man as for all nature, metamorphosis.

"Look back how it was with those who came before, look forward how it will be with those who come here after. A mortal ripens like corn, like corn he springs up again."§

Or as the Bhagvat Geeta expresses the same thought :

"As a man throweth away old garments and putteth on new, even so the soul having quitted its mortal frames entereth into others which are new."||

* Letters to H. Blake, (1849) : Letters, p. 210-11.

† Autumn, p. 121.

‡ Winter, p. 191.

§ Yajur Veda, Kath-Upan 1, 16, 3. Max Müller, Vol. XV. p. 3.

|| Bhagvat Geeta, p. 98-9.

To Thoreau, too, no thought of death could come :

“That Eternity which I see in Nature I predict for myself also.”*

The fall of the leaves which in their decay give birth to new generations of leaves, is for him a symbol of the change that we call death. “Like last year’s vegetation our human life but dies down to its root and still puts forth its green blade into eternity.”†

2. TRANSMIGRATION

In considering the Hindoo conception of immortal life, that which first suggests itself is the belief in pre-existence and in the transmigration of the soul into other bodies after the death of the present body :

“Some enter the womb in order to have a body as organic beings, others go into inorganic matter, according to their work and according to their knowledge.”‡

Thoreau often speaks of himself as having existed in earlier ages :

“And Hawthorne, too, I remember as one with whom I sauntered in old heroic times along the banks of the Scamander amid the ruins of chariots and heroes.” § ||

The character of the body which the soul assumes in the next succeeding birth depends on the character of the present life and of the works performed in it: The work remains over (after death) as seed of the next birth.

“For . . . what they praised was Karman, . . . namely that a man becomes good by good work, and bad by bad work.”**

The same idea finds expression in Thoreau thus :

* Excursions, p. 331.

† Autumn, p. 187.

‡ Yajur-Veda, Kath-Upan, 2, 5, 8. Max Müller, Vol. XV, p. 19.

§ Letter to Emerson (1843). Letters, p. 110.

|| Poems of Nature, p. 52. See also Winter (p. 247; Week, p. 28). (Poem on the death of his brother John.)

** Yajur-Veda, Birh-Upan, 3, 2, 13. Max Müller, Vol. XV, p. 227.

“Methinks the hawk that soars so loftily and circles so steadily and apparently without effort, *has earned this power by faithfully creeping on the ground as a reptile in a former state of existence.*” *

3. FORM OF THE SOUL ETERNAL.

Any changes in the bodily shape which the soul assumes are, however, merely changes in the *matter* of the soul, its *form* remains eternal, unchanging :

“This (body) indeed withers and dies when the living Self has left it ; the living Self dies not.” †

Thoreau expresses this conception in platonic language :

“The *form* of the soul is eternal, and this we can retain and express not by a foreign material and art, but by our own lives.” ‡

4. DEATH OF THE BODY MEANS ITS REUNION WITH NATURE.

Assured of the eternity of the soul as one with the eternal himself, death lost all its terrors. The dissolution of the body was natural and beautiful as a return to the bosom of the divine mother, Nature. This is most beautifully expressed in an exquisite funeral hymn of the Rig-Veda :

“So gehe ein zur mütterlichen Erde
 Sie öffnet sich zu gutigem Empfang !
 Denn frommen, zart und linde wie ein mädchen
 Sie schutze fortan dich vor dem Verderben.
 Du, Erde, thue dich auf für ihn und sei nicht eng,
 Den Eintritt mach ihm leicht, er schmiegt sich an dich an ;
 Bedeck ihn wie die Mutter die
 Das Kind in ihr Gewand verhüllt.” ¶

* Autumn, p. 255.

† Sama-Veda, Chand, 6, 11, 3. Max Müller, Vol. I, p. 103 ; cf. Plato, Phaedon, chaps. 52-54.

‡ Winter, p. 252.

¶ Geldner ; Siebenzig Lieder d. Rigveda, p. 151-2. “Then go into the bosom of mother earth, it opens in kindly welcome. May she, gentle and tender as a maiden, henceforth protect thee, the pious one, from decay. Thou, earth, open up for him and be not narrow ; make his entrance easy that he may nestle close to thee ; shelter him as a mother wraps a child in her garments.”

Thoreau looks forward to death as to the attainment of that harmony with nature which has been the goal of his life's ambition :

" Even death will take place when I have made my peace with my body and set my seal to that treaty which divine justice has so long required. I shall at length join interest with it. I anticipate a more thorough sympathy with Nature when my thigh-bones shall strew the ground like the boughs which the wind has scattered." *

5. SLEEP.

a. *Dreams.*

The nearest approach to that absorption into the Universal which death brings in fullness is a deep and dreamless sleep. A dream, on the other hand, does not differ from life itself, and scenes which pass before the dreamer are not more unreal than those which meet his waking eyes. Dreaming or awake, he apprehends a multiplicity of phenomena where there is only one reality.

" Des Traumenszustand und Wachens
Als derselbe dem Weisen gilt
Denn gleich ist beiden die Vielheit;
Aus diesem wohlerwiesenen Grund." †

The real life in the world is as unreal as dream-life and perception of reality is not to be arrived at. Thus the commentary Cankara explains :

" *Auch das Wachen ist ein Traumenszustand da ein Wachen des wirklichen selbstes nicht stattfindet, und man eine unwirkliche Realitat wie im Traume schaut.*" ‡

* Winter, p. 202.

† Altharva-Veda, Mand-Kar, II, 5, p. 583. "The states of dreaming and waking are seen by the wise man to be the same, for multiplicity (of phenomena) is common to both."

‡ Cankara Commentar, v Deussen, Upanishad's, p. 270. "The condition of being awake is also a dream, since an awakening of the real self does not take place and one views an unreal reality as in a dream."

Thoreau, without going into details, expresses the same idea :

“ I do not know how to distinguish between our waking life and a dream. Are we not always leading the life that we imagine we are ?” *

b. Deep Sleep.

As a dream corresponds to our apparent life, a dreamless sleep in which the delusion of the existence of a multiplicity of objects vanishes, and every idea of anything as outside of, or apart from the true self is lost, corresponds to our real life. It is equivalent to the death of all separate existence, return into our own true being.

Uddalaka Aruni spoke to his son :

“ When a man sleeps here, then, my dear son, he becomes united with the True, he is gone to his own (Self). Therefore, they say svapiti, he sleeps, because he is gone (apita) to his own (sva).” †

The following passage in Thoreau bears almost the character of a translation of the foregoing :

“ At night we recline and nestle and *infol*d ourselves in our being.” ‡

Under a figure the Hindoo philosopher expresses the taking up of the individual spirit into the Universal in deep sleep :

“ Now as a man embraced by a beloved wife, knows nothing that is without, nothing that is within, thus this person, when embraced by the intelligent self, knows nothing that is without, nothing that is within. This is indeed the (true) form in which his wishes are fulfilled, in which the self (only) is his wish, in which no wish is left.” §

Thoreau attaches the same meaning to deep and dreamless sleep:

* Autumn, p. 259.

† Sama-Veda, Chand-Upan, 6, 8, 2. Max Müller, Vol. I, p. 98-9.

‡ Autumn, p. 69.

§ Yajur-Veda, Brîh-Upan, 4, 3, 21. Max Müller, Vol. XV., p. 168.

"I am conscious of having in sleep transcended the limits of the individual. . . . As if in sleep our individual fell into the Universal and infinite mind and at the moment of awakening we find ourselves on the confines of the latter. On awakening we resume our enterprises, take up our bodies and become limited mind again." *

6. WIND THE BREATH OF SPIRIT.

It was probably not wholly due to the feeling of relationship to the elements, but also to the custom of burning the bodies of the dead, that the Hindoos regarded the wind which carried the smoke of the funeral pyre to the sky, as the bearer of the soul to heavenly regions. It is written in the Vedas :

"When the person goes away from this world, he comes to the wind."†

The funeral service contained the formula :

"*Nun werde Hauch, zum Winde dem Unsterblichen und dieser Leib mag endigen in Asche.*"‡

Thoreau contemplating the manner of death by shipwreck finds almost a fascination in such a giving up of life in the arms of the element :

"The strongest wind cannot stagger a spirit ; *it is a spirit's breath.*"§

7. UNCONCERN REGARDING THE FUTURE

It was a source of dissatisfaction, almost of anxiety to Thoreau's Puritan friends, that he concerned himself so little

* Spring, p. 157.

† Yajur-Veda, Brîh-Upan, 5, 10. Max Müller Vol. XV., p. 193.

‡ Yajur-Veda, Iça-Upan, 12. Deussen p. 528. "Become O breath ! Wind for the immortal, and this body may end in ashes."

An interesting parallel passage to the above occurs in Meister Eckart (v. Preger, Geschichte der deut. Mystik p. 346): "Eia! wo ist der Seele Wohnung? Sie ist auf den Federn der Winde. Die Federn sind die Krafte göttlicher Natur."

("Eia ! Where is the dwelling of the soul? It is on the wings of the wind. The wings are the forces of divine nature.")

§ Cape Cod, p. 13.

about the future life. In truth this could furnish no matter for contemplation to one who had resigned self with all its interests :

“ *Lighthearted, thoughtless*, shall I take my way,
When I to thee this being have resigned,
Well knowing at some future day
With usurer's craft, more than myself to find.”*

The Hindoo sage could exhibit the same indifference to the future and for the same reason :

“ O Yanaka, du hast den Frieden erlangt ! ” [Erkenntnis der Einheit]† Für den solches Wissenden hat die Frage wohin die Seele nach dem Tode gehe, keine Bedeutung mehr.”‡

*Autumn, p. 297.

† Yajur-Veda, Brîh-Upan, 4, 2, 4 Deussen, p. 463.

‡ v. Deussen's Introduction to 41, p. 457. O Yanaka, thou hast attained to peace ! (knowledge of oneness). For him who perceives this, the question of where the soul goes after death has no longer any importance.

CHAPTER II.

Music.

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Music.

Significance of Art.

INTRODUCTORY.

Thoreau's conception of the meaning and significance of art is a natural and organic outgrowth of his conception of the meaning of life itself. Man originates in God, and is one with God.

“ Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God who is our home.”*

At the outset of life man is one with the Eternal ; no dualism exists, no distinction between subject and object. But the world with “ the dross of sin derived from time ”† separates him far from his divine source :

“ *We have settled down on earth and forgotten heaven. We have built for this world a family mansion, and for the next a family tomb.*” Then follows Thoreau's most general definition of the purpose of Art :

“ The best works of Art are an expression of man's struggle to free himself from this condition ”‡

What is in the nature of Art that it can redeem us from earthiness and restore us to oneness with the Divine ? It is not easy to express. Thoreau, the poet, does not undertake to build up a consequent metaphysics of music and art ; in bursts of rhapsody, in light-flashes, he reveals his conception of their deepest significance.

* Wordsworth, Ode ; Intimations of Immortality, p. 157.

† Vishnu Pinana definition of Sin, p. 47.

‡ Walden, p. 61.

MUSIC.

Music is a *revelation of the Universal*. It is the expression of the real world, "the sound of universal laws promulgated."* It expresses the essence of life, the idea of the world. "It is God's voice, the divine breath audible."†

The composer utters no fact within his experience, but an inspiration from the universal soul.

"Orpheus does not hear the strains which issue from his lyre, but only those which are breathed into it."‡

It is the objectivation of the Supreme will, an emanation of Him who is the origin of the world of whom nature and man are other emanations :

"We hear the *kindred* vibrations, music ! and we put forth our dormant feelers into the limits of the universe."||

It annihilates time and space and reveals that unity which exists through all the apparent multiplicity of phenomena. It reveals the divine himself. On hearing music in the night. Thoreau writes ;

"Then idle time ran gadding by, and left me with Eternity alone ;

I hear beyond the range of sound,
I see beyond the verge of sight,

I see, smell, taste, hear, feel that everlasting something to which we are allied, at once our maker, our abode, our destiny, our very selves. I have seen how the foundations of the world are laid."§

* Week, p. 228. Thoreau makes very few references to color Art ; he writes almost exclusively of music. This was probably owing to the circumstances in which he was placed and his life of isolation in the woods, which did not present opportunities for the consideration of painting and Architecture. The music of which he writes is also of the simplest character. A drum or a flute, the distant playing of a piano or music-box ; or—what gave him especial musical pleasure—the wind playing on the telegraph wires—the "telegraph-harp."

† Summer, p. 258.

‡ Week, p. 549.

|| Winter, p. 172-3.

§ Week, p. 226.

As an expression of the eternal will, the very material of music lies outside of Time ; hence no history of music, properly speaking, is possible :

“ Most lecturers preface their discourses on music with a history of music. It has no history more than God. It circulates and resounds for ever and only flows like sea or air.

. . . I might as well try to write the history of my aspirations. There is no past in the soul.” *

a. Transcends Thought.

As music does not treat of phenomena, but of reality not of the facts of the world but of its inner character, so its message bears the character of a revelation which transcends all thought.

“ O music ! thou openest my senses to catch the least hint and *givest me no thought !*” †

Indeed all perception of the divine must be without and beyond the province of reason. The Hindoo philosopher wrote concerning the apprehension of the Supreme :

“ He (the Self) cannot be reached by speech, by mind or by the eye. How can it be apprehended except by him who says ‘ He is ? ’ . . . When he has been apprehended by the words ‘ He is,’ then his reality reveals itself.” ‡

b. Speaks with Assurance.

Music, then, as the supreme revelation of the Eternal, lifts to regions which no thought can penetrate :

“ Aye, there was a *logic* in them (the strains of music) that the combined sense of mankind could never make me doubt their conclusions.” §

No demonstration of its truth is necessary. This is the very meaning of its measured time :

“ In the steadiness and equanimity of music lies its divinity. It is the only *assured* tone.” ||

* Spring, p. 86.

† Winter, p. 413.

‡ Yajur-Veda, Kath-Upan, 2, 6, 12-13. Max Müller, vol. XV, p. 23.

§ Week, p. 225.

|| Winter, p. 172.

2. ETHICAL VALUE OF MUSIC.

a. Reveals Unreality of the Apparent World.

Herein, then, lies the power of music to redeem our lives, In the revelation of the *real* world, it makes plain that nothingness of this *present* world :

“The telegraph harp again ! Always the same unrememberable revelation it is to me. It stings my ear with everlasting truth. I get down the railroad till *I hear that which makes all the world a lie.*”*

It shows the perfection of the *perfect* life and so makes *this mean life* impossible :

“Music has caught a higher pace than any virtue that I know. *It is the arch reformer.* It is the sweetest reproach, a measured satire. When I hear this, I think of that everlasting something which is not mere sound, but is to be thrilling reality. What, then, can I do to hasten that other time, or space where there shall be no time, and where these things shall be a more living part of my life, where there will be no discords in my life.”†

The whole pettiness of our life in the world, the falseness and hollowness of our organizations is seen in the light of music’s strains :

“It is remarkable that our institutions can stand before music, *it is so revolutionary.*”‡

b. Reveals the Possibility of Harmony with the Eternal Designs.

The recognition of the meanness of life, the revelation of how inexpressibly far we are from harmony with the designs of the supreme will and from Oneness with the Universal spirit which thus reveals itself, induces the sadness which music awakens, and which is akin to repentance. The song of the wood-thrush in the still twilight is not sad ; yet heard remote from the world, when the sensibilities are most easily

* Winter, p. 146.

† Winter, p. 140.

‡ Autumn, p. 120.

reached by the communication which it makes, the eyes are filled with tears, the heart with an indefinable longing. Thus Thoreau writes :

“ A sad cheer I feel when I hear these lofty strains, because *there must be something as lofty in me that hears*. . . . *The sadness is the echo which our lives make and which alone we hear.*” *

This voice out of the eternal Harmonies reveals to man's consciousness how far he has wandered from that oneness with the All which is his due portion, a loneliness as of one in a far country steals over him ; a sense of lost joy, a soul-longing for the perfection of harmony :

“ We feel a *sad cheer* when we hear it, perchance *because we that hear are not one with that which is heard*.

Therefore a torrent of sadness deep,
Through the strains of the triumph is heard to sweep.

The sadness is ours. The Indian poet Calidas says, in the *Sacotala* :

“ Perhaps the sadness of men on seeing beautiful forms and hearing sweet music arises from some faint remembrance of past joys and the traces of connections in a former state of existence.” †

But in the sadness of music lies not only the *desire* of future perfection but the *promise* of it :

“ There are such strains in music that far surpass any man's faith in the loftiness of his destiny. ‡

Man is brought by it into touch with the Infinite himself :

“ This wire of the telegraph-harp is *my redeemer* ; *it always brings me a special and a general message from the most high.*” §

The message is none other than a revelation of our Eternity, of our relation to the Universal :

“ Suppose I try to describe faithfully the prospect which a

* Winter, p. 140.

† Week, p. 227.

‡ Winter, p. 140.

§ Winter, p. 146.

strain of music exhibits to me. The field of my life becomes a boundless plain glorious to tread, with no death or disappointment at the end of it. All meanness and trivialness disappear.*

c. Lifts Above the Limits of Personality.

In this vision of the All-pervading Spirit and our essential oneness with it, all consciousness of individuality is lost:

"No particulars survive this expansion. Persons do not survive it. In the light of this strain, *there is no thou or I. We are actually lifted above ourselves.*"†

It is momentary release from the confinement of the individual, absorption in the All:

"As I hear, I realize and see clearly what at other times I only dimly remember. I get the value of the earth's extent and the sky's depth. *It gives me the freedom of all bodies, of all nature.* I leave my body in a trance and accompany the zephyr and the fragrance."‡

d. Effects Oneness with the Universal.

Indeed, for Thoreau, who gave himself so fully to be permeated by music, who yielded himself so entirely to its sway, the vision was indeed a "trance," a condition of ecstasy such as was attained by the Mystics of the Middle Ages through contemplation of the Divine:

"The strain of the Æolian harp and of the wood thrush are the truest and loftiest preachers that I now know left upon the earth. They lift us up in spite of ourselves. They intoxicate and charm us. When was that strain mixed into which the world was dropped? I would be drunk, drunk, dead drunk to this world with it forever. *The contact of sound with the human ear whose hearing is pure is equivalent to ecstasy.*"§

* Winter, p. 181.

† Winter, p. 181.

‡ Winter, 78-9.

§ Winter, p. 78-9.

3. THE HEARING OF MUSIC A RELIGIOUS ACT.

Such then being the significance of music, he who has attained to perception should attend to it as to a sacrament, a communication from the Most High.

"*Listen to music religiously* as if it were the last strain you might hear."*

The opera may be a temple where man can commune with God :

"Men go to the opera because they hear there a faint expression of this news which is never distinctly proclaimed."†

This conception of the meaning of music is very similar to that of Plato. Thoreau himself recognizes the similiarity and cites from Plutarch :

"Plato thinks the Gods never gave men music, the science of melody and harmony for mere delectation or to tickle the ear, but that the discordant parts of the circulation and beautiful fabric of the soul and that of it that roves about the body many times for want of time and air breaks forth into many extravagances, might be sweetly recalled and artfully wound up to their former consent and agreement."‡

a. Music Only for the Virtuous.

But the communication from the Universal mind and heart can only be heard by such as are still near enough the Divine to understand the message, in whose memory is still some lingering of :

"those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all one day
Are yet a master light of all our seeing."||

Beauty and music are, therefore only for the virtuous :

"We never see any beauty but as the garment of some virtue."§

* Summer, p. 108 : cf. also p. 119.

† Letters, p. 260.

‡ Week, p. 150.

|| Ode—Intimations of Immortality. Wordw., p. 358.

§ Autumn, p. 61.

To him whose soul is pure the divine voice is ever audible.
 "The profane never hear music, the holy ever hear it." *

4. MUSIC UNIVERSAL AND PERPETUAL.

It is not even necessary that music be expressed by means of any instrument :

Debauched and worn-out senses require the violent vibrations of an instrument to excite them but sound and still youthful senses, not enervated by luxury, hear music in the wind and rain and running water. . . . *Music is perpetual and only hearing is intermittent.*"†

It is interesting to note a similar expression of the universality of music in Wordsworth :

"Many are the notes
 Which in his toneful course the wind draws forth
 From rocks, woods, caverns, heaths and dashing shores :
 , Theirs, too, is the song
 Of stream and headlong flood that never fails ;
 Nor have nature's laws
 Left them ungifted with a power to yield
 Music of a finer tone ; a harmony,
 So do I call it, though it *be the hand*
Of silence, though there be no voice," etc.‡

a. Nature and Music are One.

But Thoreau's conception of the essential oneness (*i e.* oneness in essence) of music and nature goes much deeper than a recognition of the musical quality of natural sounds. Music is an objectivation of the divine mind or will as nature is, || and the seeing soul discerns through both alike the inner character being of the world ; one suggests the other :

* Summer, p. 258. cf. Shakespeare expresses the same idea from the negative point of view :

"The man who hath no music in his soul,
 Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils, etc.

M. of Venice, v. sc. 1.

† Winter, p. 353.

‡ Excursions, II., p. 438.

|| Cf. Schopenhauer "Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung," Vol. I, p. 351. "Ist die ganze Welt als Vorstellung nur die Sichtbarkeit des Willens, so ist die Kunst die Verdeutlichung dieser Sichtbarkeit."

“There is something creative and primal in the cool mist; it does not fail to suggest *music* to me, fertility, the origin of things.” *

The distinction commonly made between nature and art calls forth Thoreau's criticism of a blind and deaf generation :

“It has come to this, that a lover of art is one and a lover of nature another. It is monstrous when one cares but little about trees and much about Corinthian columns. Any perfect work of man's art would also be wild or natural.” †

b. Music of the Spheres.

Nature is in what it expresses, one with music; the meaning of creation reveals itself in the universe musically. The inner life and design of nature, the world and world-systems is a melody which resounds through the soul of him who has reached out over the confines of limited individual perception to apprehend the idea of a universe in eternal harmony with itself. It is so impossible to express an idea of such comprehensiveness that Thoreau has made use of the Platonic explanation of the Pythagorean doctrine of sphere-harmony as the nearest approach to putting it into words :

“Pythagoras did not procure himself a thing of this kind through instruments or the voice, but, employing a certain ineffable divinity he extended his ears and fixed his intellect in the sublime symphonies of the world, he alone hearing and understanding, as it appears, the universal harmony and consonance of the spheres and the stars that are moved through them, and which produce a fuller and more intense melody than anything effected by mortal sound.” ‡

5. BEST MUSIC WORDLESS.

As music is the expression, not of any single fact, but of Universal Laws—of the world's *essence*—the most perfect music will be wordless, since words must necessarily limit the application to one particular case.

* Summer, p. 97.

† Autumn, p. 89.

‡ Week, p. 151.

Words, even the noblest, are by their very nature only fitted to the utterance of a definite, *i. e.*, *limited* thought and inadequate to the expression of the Infinite.

"There are no words worthy to be set to music—*it is eternal melody independent of any particular sense.*" *

a. Silence the most Perfect Music.

But not only is music *inexpressible* in words, at its divinest it transcends even the limitation of audible sounds. In moments of uplifting above ourselves into that boundlessness in which we have our being, into unity with

"That light whose smile kindles the universe,
That beauty in which all things live and move." †

A supersensuous sense apprehends the divinest music where to the human ear there is no sound.

"Silence alone is worthy to be heard. The silence sings. It is musical. I remember a night when it was audible. I heard the unspeakable." ‡

6. MUSIC AND THE YOGA PRACTICE.

Music leads along the same path to redemption which the Brahman follows in his highest religious exercise, the Yoga. In contemplation of the One, the Supreme, the delusion of the dualism of subject and object is overcome, the narrowing consciousness of personal existence is lost; the individual is one with the Universal, the finite exalted to Infinity.

* Week, p. 292.

† Shelley, *Alastor*, LIV, p. 375.

‡ Winter, p. 218.

CHAPTER III.

Love.

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Love.

Thoreau and the English Pantheistic Poets.

INTRODUCTORY.

I. LOVE TO NATURE.

We have seen (chap. I) that Thoreau, from his intense consciousness of the Oneness of all things in God, was imbued with the sense of his near relationship to the plant and animal life in nature. The expression of this sense of relationship, and the love of natural objects which grew out of it, finds interesting parallels in the poetry of such English pantheistic poets of his own century as Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron,* to which we will refer in considering in detail Thoreau's attitude to Nature.

2. RELATIONSHIP TO NATURAL OBJECTS.

Thus Thoreau's heart went out to the striped bream in Walden Pond, in affection which bore almost the character of a human friendship :

"My *contemporary and neighbor!* I can only think of precious jewels, of music, poetry and beauty and the mystery of life. I have a contemporary in Walden. It has fins where I have legs and arms. Acquaintance with it is to make my life more rich and eventful." †

Wordsworth's nature poetry is permeated with this feeling of the love and consideration due from man to God's other creatures ; thus :

* That these three poets belong in one group of which Wordsworth may be regarded as the head, has been demonstrated by Gillardon, *Diss.*, 1900.

† Autumn, p. 361.

“ Birds and beasts
 And the mute *fish* that
 Glances in the stream
 . . . *he loved them all,*
 Their rights acknowledging,
 He felt for all.” *

Shelley, too, undoubtedly influenced by this passage in the *Excursion*, expresses the same idea in *Alastor*.†

“ If no bright bird, insect or gentle beast I consciously have injured, but still loved and cherished these my kindred.”

Thoreau is sensible of the closest relationship to all manifestations of the Universal, not only to this earth, but to those other worlds so high above him, the stars :

“ What a consolation the stars are to men ! It is surely some encouragement to know that the stars are *my fellow creatures*.”‡

Byron thus expresses the reaching out of the human soul over the confines of its finiteness to claim oneness with the Universal :

“ Ye stars—’tis to be forgiven
 That in our aspirations to be great,
 Our destinies o’er leap their mortal state,
 And *claim a kindred with you*.” §

3.—LOVE OF NATURE A PASSION.

The sense of affinity with the earth may bear almost the character of an appetite. Thus Wordsworth writes of his early love for nature :

. . . . “ Nature then
 . . . To me was all in all—
 I cannot paint what then I was ; the tall rock
 The mountains and the deep and gloomy rock
 Their colors and their forms were to me an appetite.” ||

Thoreau uses the simile of human hunger to characterize his longing for close contact with nature.

* *Excursions*, II., p. 433. 41-47.

† *Alastor*, p. 85. 13-15. v. Ackermann “ Shelley.”

‡ *Excursions*, p. 178.

§ *Childe Harold*, III. LXXXVIII.

|| *Tintern Abbey*.

"O dear nature! A remembrance of pine woods! come to it as *a hungry man to a crust of bread.*"* "I love and could *eat* the brown earth."†

A passion akin to human passion leads him to seek the society of natural objects. The dear wholesome colour of scrub-oak leaves so clean and firm! . . . *I love and could embrace* the scrub-oak, with its scanty garment of leaves, rising above the snow, lowly whispering to me, akin to winter thoughts, and sunsets, and all virtue; coverts which the hare and the partridge seek and I too seek. Rigid as iron, clean as the atmosphere, hardy as virtue, innocent and sweet as a maiden is the scrub-oak."‡

4.—MANIFESTATIONS OF THE DIVINE IN NATURE THE SOURCE OF NATURE LOVE.

But when the full significance of Nature as objectivation of the eternal mind and soul is perceived, all phenomena in Nature are loved with a reverent and mystic love, as manifestations of that indwelling spirit. Thoreau always approached Nature in this attitude of reverence. Mr. Burroughs says of him:

"It was *supernatural* history rather than *natural* history that he studied;"§ and this makes itself felt in his relations to all living things.

"I tread in the steps of the fox with such tip-toe of expectation, as if I were on the trail of the Spirit itself which resides in the wood and expected soon to catch it in its lair."||

Life in nature signifies to him communion with this spiritual presence:

"It is as if I have always met in those places some grand, serene immortal infinitely encouraging yet invisible *companion* and communed with him. . . . I love and celebrate nature even in detail, because *I love the scenery of these interviews and translations.*"**

* Autumn, p. 420.

† Summer, p. 105.

‡ Autumn, p. 367.

§ Century Magazine, April, 1882.

|| Excursions, p. 144.

** Winter, p. 135.

Wordsworth, too, stood in just such near and serene communion with the Spirit of All :

“ And I have felt
A *presence* that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns.
And the round ocean, and the living air
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man ;
A motion and a Spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore I am still
A lover of the meadows, and the woods and mountains.”*

5.—THE SPIRIT OF NATURE IS THE SPIRIT OF LOVE.

This all-pervading Spirit is for Thoreau, one with the Spirit of Love, which permeates the Universe. Love is the mainspring and significance of all the manifold life in Nature.

“ Love is the burden of all nature’s odes, the song of birds is an epithalamium, a hymeneal. . . . In the deep water, in the high air, in woods and pastures and the bowels of the earth, this is the condition of things.”†

Shelley gives expression to the same thought :

“ Hearest thou not the sounds in the air which speak the love
Of all articulate beings.”‡

The very elements seem to Thoreau but breathings of love :

“ The light of the sun is but the shadow of love. Love is in the wind, the tides, the waves, the sunshine. Its power is incalculable ; it never ceases ; it never slacks.”§

So also Shelley :

“ Where the air we breathe is love
Which in the winds and on the wave doth move,
Harmonizing the earth with what we feel above.”||

* Tintern Abbey.

† Spring, p. 35.

‡ Prometheus Unbound, Act II., sc. v.

§ Miscellanies, p. 68.

|| Prometheus Unbound, Act II. sc. v.

Byron is impressed by this "power incalculable," as he contemplates the beauty of the mountain-landscape and finds love

. . . . A pervading life and light so shown
Not on these summits solely, nor alone
In the still cave and forest; o'er the flower
His eye is sparkling and his breath hath blown,
His soft and summer breath whose tender power
Passes the strength of storms in their most desolate hours."*

Love is Omnipresent, omnipotent, the Power and Spirit of Nature itself—God. Thus Byron apostrophizes the Spirit:

"Vast and deep as night and heaven,
Nature or God or Love."†

6.—LOVE THE ATMOSPHERE OF LIFE IN NATURE.

He who recognizes the perfect Oneness of all things in nature—that is, in God—rests on the bosom of love. This love of God to man, bore for Wordsworth a *personal* character; it brought with it the idea of protection and watchful providence:

"The being that is in the clouds and air
That is in the green leaves among the groves,
Maintains a deep and reverential care for
The unoffending creatures whom he loves."‡

For Thoreau, on the other hand, it remained ever the all-pervading spirit, an atmosphere in which he moved and breathed;

"I will not doubt for ever more
Nor falter from a steadfast faith;
I will not doubt the *love untold*
Which not my worth nor want hath brought,
Which wooed me young, and woos me old
And to this evening hath me brought."§

"The love wherewith we are loved is already declared and

* Childe Harold, III. p. 100.

† Laon and Cyntha, V.

‡ Hart-Leap Well, II. p. 125.

§ Poems of Nature, "Inspiration," p. 8.

a float in the atmosphere, and our love is only the inlet to it. It grows on every bush, and let not those complain of their fates who will not pluck it."*

II.—Love and Friendship.

I—PLATONIC LOVE.

The love of man to natural objects has, then, its source in the perception of the Universe as an incorporation of the Universal Spirit. One with the All, we are related to every other manifestation of it. True love of man to man exists upon the same ground. It is not so much sympathy of *the human with the human*, as sympathy which holds in itself the necessity of a struggle to secure the dominance of spirit, and of a striving towards fuller beauty, truth and perfection of life. This was already the highest truth of the Platonic conception of love :

" And the true order of going. . . . to the things of love is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upward for the sake of that other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two and from two to all fair forms and from fair forms to fair practices and from fair practices to fair notions until from fair notions we arrive at the notion of absolute beauty and at last know what the essence of beauty is. . . . Remember how in that communion only . . . he will be able to bring forth not images of beauty, but realities, and bringing forth and nourishing true virtue to become the friend of God."†

Thoreau's contemporary, Emerson, adopted with some modifications, the platonic conception as is clear from the following passage in his Essay on " Love " :

. . . " By conversation with that which is in itself excellent, magnanimous, lowly and just, the lover comes to a warmer love of these nobilities and a quicker apprehension of them. Then he passes from loving them in one to loving them in all,

† Winter, p. 201.

† Symposium, p. 580-81.

and so is the one beautiful soul only the door through which he enters to the society of all true and pure souls. . . . And beholding in many souls the traits of the divine beauty . . . the lover ascends to the highest beauty, to the love and knowledge of Divinity, by steps on this ladder of created souls."*

2.—LOVE-COMMUNITY OF IDEALS.

Thoreau held to the Emersonian conception, though he never expressed it with such clear consequence, but only gave expression to his passion for the ideal in disjointed and often mystic utterances. Love bears no touch of individualism or of superficial attraction ; it can only have to do with the inner aspiration :

"As soon as I see people loving *what they see merely and not their own high hopes that they form of others*, I pity them and do not want their Love. Did I ask thee to love me who hate myself? No! Love that which I love and I will love thee that loves it."†

Love, is, then community of ideals :

"I value those who *love and praise my aspiration rather than my performance*. If you would not stop to look at me, but look *whither I am looking* and farther, then my education could not afford to dispense with your company."‡

Thus love demands the highest and noblest of which the lover is capable :

"Love is a severe critic ; hate can pardon more than love. They who aspire to love worthily, subject themselves to an ordeal more rigid than any other." §

a. Love Detects Faults.

He who loves, lives, as it were, under the searching light of an eternal perfection, though *but in ideal*, which reveals the slightest defect :

* Essay on Love : "Complete note," p. 48.

† Spring, p. 133.

‡ Week, p. 369.

§ Letters, p. 240.

"The infusion of love from a great soul *gives color to our faults*, which will discover them as lunar caustic detects impurities in water."*

From its nature, then, love precludes the association of those who love on any other than the plain of upward aspiration :

"The *luxury* of affection—there's the danger ! There must be some nerve and heroism in our love, as of a winter morning. . . . *The love which takes us as it finds us degrades us.*" †

b. The Place of Hate in Love.

Thus in perfect love, hate must have a place—hatred and absolute cutting off of all that does not tend to that perfection which is the final aim of Love ;

"Let us *love by refusing not by accepting one another*. Love and lust are far asunder. We must love our friend so much that she shall be associated with our purest and holiest thoughts alone." ‡

"Let such pure *hate* still underprop our love,
That we may be
Each other's conscience.
And have our sympathy mainly from thence." §

3.—LOVE UNIVERSAL NOT PERSONAL.

It will be seen that this love does not in any degree bear a worldly character, but is a going out of soul to soul in the hope and faith of aspiration ;

"Friendship as not so kind as is imagined ; *it has not much human blood in it. It requires immaculate and God-like qualities full-grown, and exists at all only by condescension and anticipation of the remotest future.*" ||

Such love transcends the limits of the individual ; it confines itself to no *person*, but is the high passion for virtue and perfection. Thoreau would thus address his friend :

* Spring, p. 56.

† Letters, p. 249 : "Love and Friendship."

‡ Letters, p. 248 : "Love and Friendship."

§ Week, p. 379.

|| Week, p. 393.

"I love you not as something private and personal, which is your own, but as something universal and worthy of love, which I have found. . You are purely good. . This is what I would like—to be as intimate with you as our spirits are intimate—respecting you as I respect my ideal." *

When this plane of ideal communion is reached even association is not necessary. Thus he continues :

"Between us, if necessary, let there be no acquaintance. I have discovered you ; how can you be concealed from me?" †

a. Death Cannot Interrupt Love's Intercourse.

Absence or death cannot interrupt such high intercourse. Thoreau writes of the death of his friend Wheeler :

"Distance forsooth from my weak grasp hath reft
The empty husk and clutched the useless tare,
But in my hands the wheat and kernel left.

*If I but love that virtue which he is,
Though it be scented in the morning air,
Still shall we be truest acquaintances,
Nor mortals know a sympathy more rare."* ‡

4.—ETHICAL VALUE OF LOVE.

Such love cannot fail to effect the redemption of our lives from all sin and imperfection :

"Love tends to purify and sublime itself : it mortifies and triumphs over the flesh, and the bond of its union is holiness. §

III.—Love and Marriage.

Thoreau conceives of the love which finds its expression in marriage as existing upon the same ideal ground. In this most perfect faith and oneness of aspiration the highest dream of perfection should be attainable, and the redemption of the human race effected :

"A true marriage will differ in no wise from an illumina-

* Week, p. 355.

† Week, p. 355.

‡ "Sympathy," Poems of nature, p. 24-5.

§ Winter, p. 232.

tion. . . . No wonder that out of such a union, not as an end but as an accompaniment, comes the undying race of man. . . . the offspring of noble men and women . . . *as superior to themselves as their aspirations are.*"*

IV.—Love to Mankind.

I.—NOT PHILANTHROPY.

Thoreau's interpretation of love to mankind bears the same ideal character as his conception of friendship. There must be no yielding to the weakness of humanity, no disproportionate care for the material and earthly in life. Love is by no means synonymous with charity in the narrow sense of philanthropy. The high value commonly placed upon this phase of it is but an evidence of our meanness and egotism :

"Philanthropy is the only virtue which is sufficiently appreciated by mankind. Nay, it is greatly overrated, and it is *our selfishness which overrates it.*

"The kind uncles and aunts of the race are more esteemed than its spiritual fathers and mothers." †

It is possible to give ourselves more greatly, not merely in benevolence, which is, "as it were, but stem and leaves," but the whole flower and fruit of our lives. Thoreau considered the force of his life's example his peculiar gift to the American people. Even to those whose need demanded material relief, its simplicity could bring the surest aid :

"*We can render the best assistance by letting men see how rare a thing it is to need any assistance.* I am not in haste to help men any more than God is." ‡

2. UNIVERSAL IN CHARACTER.

Thoreau had for himself solved the problem of eradicating the struggle for subsistence from his life, hence his sympathy went out to his fellow-men *not on account of their weakness and need, but in spite of it—above and beyond it—in*

* "Chastity and Sensuality," Letters, p. 250-251.

† Walden, p. 121-122.

‡ Winter, p. 213.

love which was but the effluence of a life making for that virtue and perfection which alone could redeem the weakness and forever satisfy the needs.

“The great and solitary soul will expend its love as a cloud drops rain upon the fields over which it floats.” *

“The good how we can trust,
Only the wise are just ;
. . . *No partial sympathy* they feel,
With *private* woe or private weal ;
But *with the Universe* joy or sigh,
Whose knowledge is their sympathy.” †

V.—Oneness with the Spirit of Love is the Goal of Love.

This all-embracing sympathy is akin to the devotion of the Buddhist saint, which passes the bounds of the limited and individual into the illimitable and universal :

“He lets his mind pervade one quarter of the universe with thoughts of love, and so the second and so the third and so the fourth. And *thus the whole wide world, above, below, around and everywhere does he continue to pervade with heart of Love, far-reaching and beyond measure.*” ‡

This boundless love amounts to knowledge of Divinity, sympathy with supreme intelligence. We become one with the Universal, with Love itself.

“The object of love expands and grows before us to eternity, until it includes all that is lovely, and *we become all that can love.*” §

* Spring, p. 139.

† Week, p. 371.

‡ Tevigga Sutta, p. 191.

§ Essay on Love, Letters, p. 245.

CHAPTER IV.
Politics.

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Politics.

1.—INTRODUCTORY.

In his still life of isolation and contemplation, Thoreau would fain have concerned himself little about the political happenings which had their place in that external world which, with its busy, trivial interests, was to him but a puppet show. In his earliest work he writes :

“To one who habitually endeavors to contemplate the *true* state of things, the *political* state can hardly be said to have any existence whatever. It is *unreal, incredible and insignificant* to him and for him to endeavor to extract the truth from such lean material is like making sugar from linen rags, when sugar-cane may be had.” *

Emerson accounted for Thoreau's attitude towards politics by citing Aristotle to the effect that : “One who surpasses his fellow-citizens in virtue is no longer a part of the city. Their law is not for him since he is a law to himself.” †

But when flagrant abuses of government were manifest, such as the unjust war with Mexico—entered upon by the American government from motives of greed—and the enactment of Webster's Fugitive Slave Bill, Thoreau felt himself compelled to recall to the minds of his countrymen the meaning and purpose of government.

2.—CIVILIZATION CORRUPT.

Civilization seems to Thoreau to be but a doubtful good. The manifold business of the world, the over-valuing of the merely material and unimportant in life, diverts attention from the true source and meaning of life itself :

* Week, p. 166.

† R. W. Emerson, Biographical Sketch, Miscellanies (Preface), p. 26.

" . . . It is error upon error and clout upon clout, and *our best virtue has for its occasion a superfluous and evitable wretchedness. Our life is frittered away by detail.* . . . In the midst of *this chopping sea of civilized life* such are the clouds and storms and quicksands and thousand-and-one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live, if he would not founder and go to the bottom and not make his port at all, by dead reckoning and he must be a great calculator indeed who succeeds. . . . The nation, itself, with all its so-called *internal* improvements, which, by the way, are all *external* and superficial, is just such an unwieldy and overgrown establishment, cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own traps, ruined by luxury and heedless expense."*

a. Remedy: Return to Nature.

The remedy is simplicity and naturalness of life. † It is necessary to cast off the clogging weights with which society is hung about, and to lead once more a natural life.

"*In society you will not find health, but in nature.* As nature feeds my imagination she will also feed my body. There is not necessarily any gross or ugly fact which may not be eradicated from the life of a man." ‡

3.—THOREAU AND ROUSSEAU.

This criticism of civilized life and advocacy of return to nature cannot fail to recall Rousseau, who proclaimed the same message to society in the preceding century—a message which had been echoed by the American constitution itself. That Rousseau exercised any direct influence upon Thoreau's political views is impossible to establish as Thoreau does not once mention him in his writings. There is, however, almost no possibility that he did not know Rousseau as he was well acquainted with French literature.

Their political ideas bear in many points a resemblance to each other which may be interesting to note in connection with the statement of Thoreau's political principles.

* Walden, p. 144-5.

† v. Letter to H. Blake (1848). Letters, p. 194.

‡ Letters, p. 199.

4.—BASIS OF GOVERNMENT THE INDIVIDUAL.

Since civilization, though evil, is, nevertheless, established, it is necessary to seek the best method of overcoming its drawbacks. Thus Thoreau states in general terms his reason for devoting any attention to the political situation which he had formerly criticized as having no existence for him:

“No doubt they have designs on us for our benefit in making the life of a civilized people an institution in which the life of the individual is to a great extent absorbed in order to preserve and perfect that of the race. *But I wish to show at what a sacrifice this advantage is at present obtained and to suggest that we may possibly so live as to secure the advantages without suffering any of the disadvantages.*” *

Rousseau maintained in opposition to the prevailing political doctrines established by Grote and Hobbes, that the government was made for man and not man for the government. According to Rousseau, the state originated in the voluntary association of free individuals for joint protection and aid in the struggle to maintain life in the face of all the dangers which beset them singly. † The object of the social contract must be then to find

“Une forme d’association qui défende et protège de toute la force commune la personne et les biens de chaque associé, et par laquelle *chacun s’unissant à tous, n’obéisse pourtant qu’à lui-même et reste aussi libre qu’ auparavant.*” ‡

The basis of the state is *the individual*. Thoreau expresses it more directly and emphatically :

“Even the Chinese philosopher was wise enough to regard the individual as the base of the empire. . . . There will never be a really free and enlightened state, until the state comes to recognize *the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all power and authority are derived*, and treats him accordingly.” §

* Walden, p. 52.

† Contrat Social, p. 29.

‡ Contrat Social, p. 19.

§ Miscellanies, p. 169.

5.—DEMOCRACY THE BEST FORM OF GOVERNMENT.

The best form of Government is, therefore, that under which the rights of the individual receive the most consideration. Thoreau held the democratic to be the most desirable constitution :

“The progress from an absolute to a limited monarchy, from a monarchy to a democracy is a *progress towards a true regard for the individual*.”*

It would be natural to conclude that Rousseau's ideal government would also be a democracy, but he considered it an impossibility.

“Il n'a jamais existé de véritable Démocratie et il n'existera jamais. *Un gouvernement si parfait ne convient pas à des hommes.* †

The main reason, according to Rousseau, why a true democracy cannot exist is that a nation—especially a great nation—cannot always remain in congress to decide questions of government. Representation he held to be impossible. The bond which holds a nation together is the will of all who associate themselves to form it and *will* cannot be represented:

“*La volonté ne se représente point ; les députés du peuple ne sont donc ni peuvent être ses représentants, ils ne sont que ses commissaires.*” ‡

When the so-called representative government can take the liberty to act as it will without further consulting the people, it is not democratic. Thus Rousseau criticized government by representation as it exists in England :

“Le peuple Anglais pense être libre ; il se trompe fort ; il ne l'est que durant l'élection des membres du Parlement ; sitôt qu'ils sont élus, il est esclave, il n'est rien.” §

a. Danger of Perversion to Serve Individual Ends.

Thoreau experienced in America the evil consequence of

* Miscellanies, p. 169.

† Contrat Social, p. 90.

‡ Contrat Social, p. 128.

§ Contrat Social, p. 128.

this absolute delegation of all executive power to the government for a period of time, without means of holding the government in check during that time :

“The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is *equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it*. Witness the present Mexican war, *the work of comparatively few individuals using the standing government as their tool*, for in the outset the people would never have consented to such a measure.”*

b. Principle of Majority-Government False.

Rousseau thought to get over this danger of the perversion of government to serve individual ends by excluding from his ideal state all exercise of the individual will. It is one of the conditions of the framing of the social contract that the individual will shall sink itself entirely in the common will (*volonté général*). What this common will is, what constitutes it and how it is to be arrived at, Rousseau does not explain. He does not appear to have meant it to be in any sense synonymous with the will of all or the majority (*volonté de tous*), yet he writes :

“Plus les délibérations sont important et grave, plus l’avis, qui l’emporte doit approcher de l’unanimité.”†

It seems difficult to eliminate the individual element or to obtain more than government by majority, and the constitution of Rousseau’s compacted State is after all scarcely less framed for perfect beings than the “impossible” democratic constitution. In America the principle has always prevailed that the majority carries the day. Thoreau does not consider this to be based upon any moral law, but upon the purely brutal “might is right”—

“Majority rules—not because most likely to be in the right, but because they are physically the strongest. A government in which the majority rule in all cases cannot be based on justice even as men understand it.”‡

* Miscellanies, p. 132.

† Contrat Social, p. 146.

‡ Miscellanies, p. 133. -

Far from the majority being always in right, it is *very* liable to be in the wrong :

"There is but little virtue in the action of *masses* of men."*

The standard of an aggregated or associated body of men, such as a nation, is invariably much lower than the standard of the individual citizen. The individual citizen hesitates to rob or murder his neighbor, but the nation does not hesitate to enrich itself at the expense of another nation, at whatever cost of blood ; and the individual *as patriot*, will do zealously at the command of the government, what he in his capacity of *private individual* would consider criminal. Hence the necessity for an *individual not a national or a majority* standard :

"Must the citizen even for a moment or in the least degree resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience then? I think *we should be men first, citizens afterwards*. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right."†

6.—OBJECT OF GOVERNMENT.

But what a man would consider right for the government depends upon his conception of the end or object of government. Here Thoreau takes higher ground than Rousseau. Rousseau's object in considering the establishment of an ideal form of government was to preserve the liberty of the people and their equality (fraternity was very desirable but not indispensable ‡), and by this means to eradicate from the human heart those base passions, hatred, envy, cowardice, hypocrisy, which have crept in as accompaniments of civilization and are foreign to a state of nature. §

a. Kant and Emerson : Morality the Object of Government.

America was, however, at the time Thoreau wrote, feeling the influence of Kant's ideal of government—absolute

* Miscellanies, p. 140.

† Miscellanies, p. 134.

‡ See "Discours sur l'inégalité," p. 103, p. 120, p. 110.

§ See "Discours sur l'inégalité," p. 103, 110, 120.

justice. * The high ideal of the moral character and purpose of government as revealed by the German philosopher was caught up by Carlyle in England, † and through him transmitted to America, where Emerson was the first to proclaim it, in frequent utterances such as the following :

"The end of all political struggle is to *establish morality as the basis of all legislation*. 'Tis not free institutions, 'tis not democracy that is the end, no, but only the means. *Morality is the object of government*.'" ‡

Thoreau has no patience with the doctrine that the state exists to safeguard the rights and further the comforts of its members. This seems to him but the ideal of "pigs in a litter which lie close together to keep each other warm." § Even freedom is only of value as it conduces to moral strength :

"Do we call this the land of the free? . . . *What is the value of political freedom but as a means to moral freedom !*" ||

7.—CHARACTER OF (THE BEST) GOVERNMENT.

a. *The Best Men Its Members.*

A government which will make for morality demands the choice of the best men for its members. The opposite occurs but too often in American politics and calls forth sarcastic remarks from Thoreau :

"So some, it seems to me, elect their rulers for their crookedness. But I think that a straight stick makes the best cane and an upright man the best ruler." **

b. *Representative of the Best Elements of the Nation.*

If the end of government is morality, the first requisite is that its component parts, the deputies of the people, shall

* v. Idee zu einer allg. Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht Bd. IV, 297-309.

† Essays IV, "Corn Law Rhymes," etc.

‡ "Fortune of the Republic," Complete Works, p. 491.

§ Autumn, p. 144.

|| Miscellanies, p. 138.

** Excursions, p. 226.

represent the highest moral aspirations of the people. Thus Thoreau exclaims bitterly against the American government in his protest against the Slave Bill of 1851 :

" We talk about a representative government, but what a monster of a government is that where the noblest faculties of mind and the whole heart are not represented." *

8. RELATION OF THE CITIZEN TO THE GOVERNMENT.

a. Duty of Obedience to the law of his own being only.

Since government is representative of the people, the citizens of the state remain always responsible for it and may not deposit their responsibility with their votes. Rousseau acknowledged the *right* of the people to change the laws : † Thoreau insisted upon the *duty* of each citizen to resist any action of the government which menaces the moral perfection of the state. This does not imply by any means an anti-governmental or unpatriotic attitude, but rather unswerving loyalty to the highest principles.

" It is not for a man to put himself in opposition to society, but to maintain himself in whatever attitude he finds himself through *obedience to the laws of his being, which will never be in opposition to a just government.*" ‡

The conscience of the individual to whom the divine and eternal order of the Universe itself has been revealed, judges by a higher standard than that known to other men :

" They who know no purer source of truth, who have traced up its stream no higher, stand, and wisely stand, by the Bible and the Constitution, and drink at it there with reverence and humility ; but they who behold where it comes trickling into this lake or that pool, gird up their loins once more and continue their pilgrimage toward the fountain-head." §

* Miscellanies, p. 223.

† Contrat Social, p. 71.

‡ See Page's "Thoreau," p. 196-7.

§ Miscellanies, p. 168.

Again Thoreau expresses the same thought, without the metaphor, thus :

"Serve God by obeying the eternal and only just Constitution which He, and not any Jefferson or Adams, has written in your being." *

The perception of the highest meaning and source of law, frees a man from all bondage to the law ; he is not subject to the same conditions as his neighbors, he resembles a soldier who "marches to a music unheard by those about him."

"He who lives according to the highest law is in a sense lawless." † "Live free child of the mist! *The man who takes the liberty to live is superior to all laws, by virtue of his relation to the law-maker.*" ‡

That those who thus assert their superiority to the government should be regarded by it as its enemies, and not as its best friends and redeemers, is natural enough :

"A very few (men), as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense and *men*, serve the state with their consciences; and so, necessarily, resist it for the most part ; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it." §

This may not, however, deter the conscientious from throwing himself with all the might of his conviction into the balance for right.

b. Right of Resistance.

Rousseau was of the opinion that when the individual is dissatisfied with the government's actions, his only resource is to leave the state.|| Thoreau holds it for his duty to remain, under suffering if need be, and effect a reform of the evil :

"Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the only true place for a just man is in prison," ¶ he affirmed in

* Miscellanies, p. 188.

† Spring, p. 17.

‡ Excursions, p. 295.

§ Miscellanies, p. 136.

|| Contrat Social, p. 138.

¶ Miscellanies, p. 149.

his impassioned speech in behalf of the emancipation of the slaves. Nor were these empty words. He himself suffered imprisonment for denying allegiance to a state which had violated the fundamental rights of humanity. He thus records the experience :

"I was seized and put to gaol because I did not recognize the authority of a state which buys and sells men, women and children at the door of its senate-house."*

True loyalty implies and necessitates opposition to such a government :

"They are the lovers of law and order *who observe the law when the government breaks it.*"†

c. Individual Responsibility.

Legislators are not keepers of the consciences of the citizens, nor depositaries of the responsibility resting upon every man who has a conscience :

"Look not to legislators for your guidance ; nor to any *soulless or incorporated* bodies ; but to *inspired or inspired* ones."‡

This was the ground of his plea for Capt. John Brown, imprisoned and hanged for championing the cause of the slaves against the government :

"This man was an exception, for *he did not set up a political graven image between him and his God.*"§ "No man in America has ever stood up so persistently and effectively for the dignity of human nature, *knowing himself for a man and the equal of any and all governments.*"||

d. Power of One Man.

But the objection was raised on all sides : "It is useless for one man to oppose the majority." Thoreau answers :

"Alas ! this is the crying sin of the age, this want of faith in the prevalence of a man. *Nothing can be effected but by one man.*"**

* Walden, p. 268.

† Miscellanies, p. 181.

‡ Miscellanies, p. 244.

§ Miscellanies, p. 210.

|| Miscellanies, p. 217.

** Miscellanies, p. 62.

A man who stands for the right has God on his side, supreme might :

" *Any man more right than his neighbors is a majority of one already. It matters not how small the beginning may be, what is once well done, is done for ever.*" *

9.—THOREAU'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS SOCIALISM.

Thoreau was in no sense a socialist. In his criticism of the Fourierite scheme, he expresses his views unmistakably.

The aims of the socialists are of *too purely material a character* to appeal to him.† The object of national life and of government is pure morality ; the only endeavor worthy of men is not to better merely the temporal conditions of life, but the eternal conditions of the inner life.

10.—IDEAL GOVERNMENT—ABOLITION OF GOVERNMENT.

The perfecting of the inner life, the development of the individual to perfect virtue would do away with the necessity of government. In Rousseau's ideal state, the giving up of the individual will to the common will, rendered but very few laws necessary. Thoreau dreamed that the merging of the individual will in the Universal, the attainment by the individual of sympathy with the infinite designs of the All, would abolish law and government :

" I heartily endorse the motto: ' That government is best which governs least.' . . . Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which I also believe, ' *That government is best which governs not at all.*' " ‡

This is, however, an ideal for the future, and he adds in consideration of the present :

" I ask not at once for *no* government but *at once* for a better government." §

* Miscellanies, p. 147-8.

† v. Miscellanies, p. 113.

‡ Miscellanies, p. 137.

§ Miscellanies, p. 133.

APPENDIX.

Chronological Table.

- 1817 Born, July 12.
- 1818 Family moved to Chelmsford (till 1821).
- 1821-3 Boston.
- 1823 Concord. School. Academy.
- 1833 Entered Harvard University.
- 1834 Began the practice of writing "Themes" and "Forensics."
- 1835 (a) Taught in Maine during vacation.
 (b) First record of day's observations, April 20.
 (c) Essay on "Simplicity of Style."
- 1836 (a) Peddling trip with father to New York.
 (b) Essay on "Effect of Story Telling."
- 1837 (a) Essay on Milton's "Il Penseroso" and "L'Allegro."
 (b) Essay on "Commercial Life."
 (c) Graduation from Harvard.
 (d) Met Emerson.
 (e) Began the Red Journal in October.
 (f) Essay "On the Source of our Feeling for the Sublime."
 (g) Essay "On Paley's Common Reasons."
- 1838 (a) To Maine to obtain position.
 (b) First lecture, on "Society," in April.
 Second lecture, on "Sound and Silence."
 (c) Refused to pay church tax.
- 1839 (a) Trip on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers.
 (b) Private school in Concord.
 (c) Trip to the White Mountains.
- 1840 (a) "Aulus Perseus Flaccus," first published paper in the
 "Dial."
 (b) Wrote for the "Dial" from July (till 1844).
 (c) Meetings of the Concord Circle at Emerson's house.
 (d) Closed the Red Journal in June—596 pages.
- 1841 (a) Began a new journal—396 pages.
 (b) Wrote against the Brook Farm project.
- 1842 (a) Brother John died.
 (b) Hawthorne returned to the "Old Manse" (till 1846).
 (c) Alcott and Lane went to Brook Farm (till 1843).
 (d) Published "A Natural History of Massachusetts"
 in the "Dial."

- 1843 . . . (a) Published "A Winter Walk" in the "Dial."
 (b) Met Horace Greeley in New York.
 (c) Staten Island: tutor to William Emerson's sons.
 (d) Published "Walk to Wachusett" in "Boston Miscellany."
 (e) Published "Paradise to be Regained," and "The Landlord," in New York Democratic Record.
 (f) Translations from Pindar, published in the "Dial."
 (g) Translated "Seven against Thebes" (till 1847; never printed).
 (h) Translation of "Prometheus Bound" (1843-4), published in the "Dial."

NOTE.—After 1843 wrote little poetry and destroyed much already written.

- 1844 . . . (a) "Dial" suspended publication.
 (b) Translation of Pindar (continued).
 (c) "Herald of Freedom" published in the "Dial."
 1845 . . . (a) Withdrew to Walden Woods.
 (b) In gaol for refusing to pay State taxes.
 (c) Essay on Wendell Phillips; published in the "Liberator."
 1846 . . . (a) Essay on Civil Disobedience.
 (b) First trip to the Maine forests.
 1847 . . . (a) At the Emersons; Emerson in England.
 (b) Wrote essay on "Friendship."
 (c) Made collections for Agassiz.
 (d) Essay on Carlyle. Published in Graham's Magazine.

NOTE.—From 1847 lectured occasionally but regularly every year for twenty years.

- 1848 . . . (a) Essay on "Maine Woods;" published in Union Magazine.
 (b) Lectured in Salem Lyceum.
 (c) Left Emerson's.
 1849 . . . (a) At home in Concord.
 (b) Published the "Week."
 (c) Trip to Cape Cod.
 1850 . . . (a) Journey into Canada.
 (b) Second visit to Cape Cod.
 1851 . . . (a) "Winter" records in Diary until 1860 (according to seasons).
 1852 . . . (a) Manuscript of "A Yankee in Canada," given to Greeley for publication.
 1853 . . . (a) Second trip to Maine woods.
 (b) Publication of "Canada" begun in Putnam's Magazine. (withdrawn after the third chapter).
 1854 . . . (a) Met Thomas Cholmondeley.
 (b) Publication of Walden.
 (c) Slavery in Massachusetts, published in the "Liberator."

- 1855 . . . (a) Received 44 vols. Hindoo literature from Cholmondeley.
 (b) Trip to Truro.
- 1856 . . . (a) Met Walt Whitman in Brooklyn (with Alcott).
 (b) Visited Horace Greeley at Chappaqua (with Alice Carey and Alcott).
 (c) Refused offer of tutorship to Greeley's sons.
- 1857 . . . (a) Met John Brown. (Introduced by Sanborn.)
 (b) Third trip to the Maine Woods.
- 1858 . . . (a) "Chesucook," published in the Atlantic Monthly.
- 1859 . . . (a) John Brown captured October 18.
 (b) Speech, "Plea for Captain John Brown," October 30 and Nov. 1.
 Speech, for memorial service, Dec. 2.
- 1860 . . . (a) Outbreak of war between North and South.
 (b) Publication of "A Plea for Captain John Brown," in "Echoes from Harper's Ferry."
 Publication of "Last Days of John Brown," in the "Liberator."
 (Delivered as a lecture at North Elba, July 4.)
 (c) Publication of "The Succession of Forest Trees," in the New York weekly Tribune.
- 1861 . . . (a) Trip to Minnesota (for his health.)
- 1862 . . . (a) Death.
 (b) Emerson's Biographical Sketch in Atlantic Monthly for August.
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